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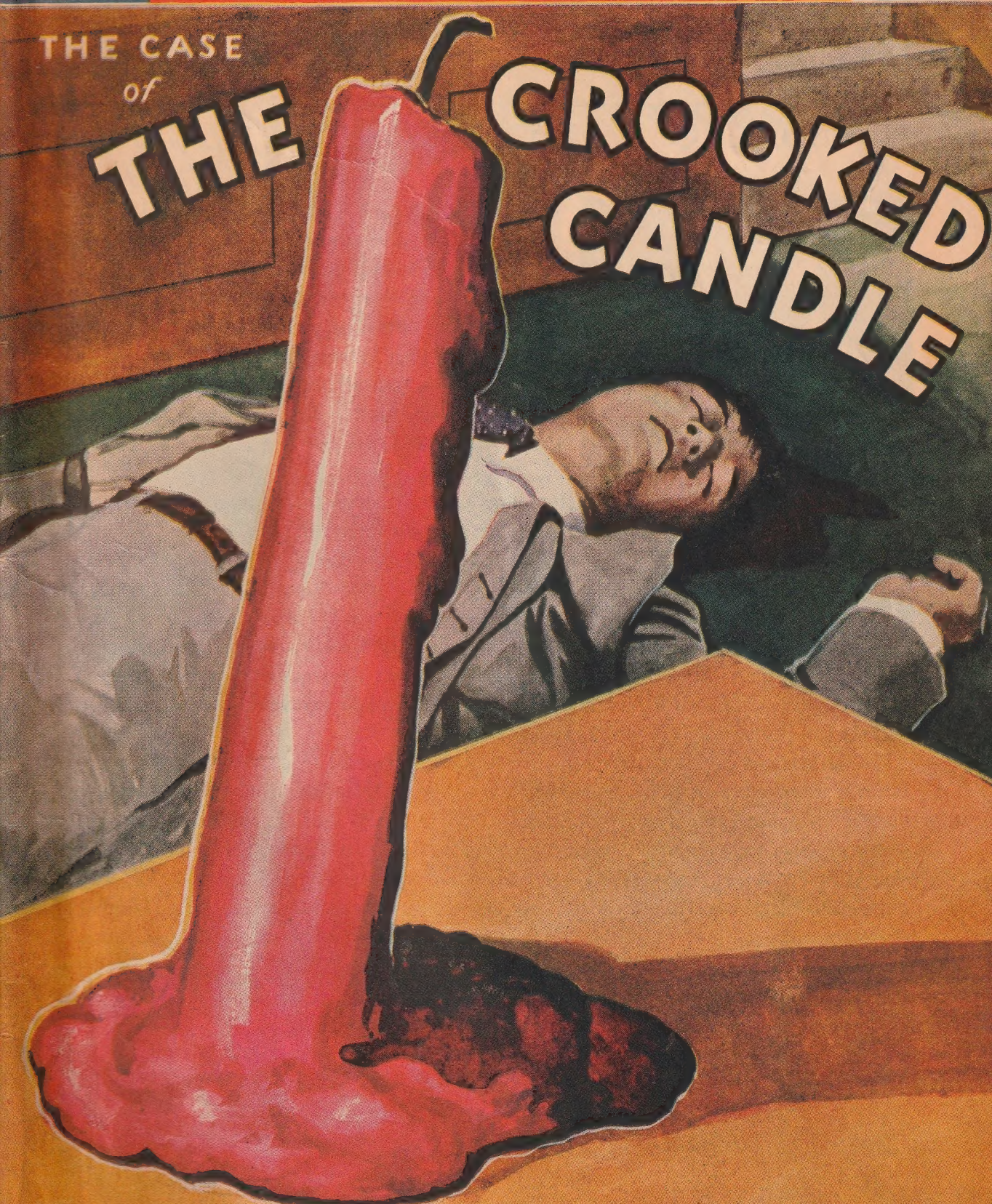
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THE CASE  
of

**THE**

**CROOKED  
CANDLE**



By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**E**RLE STANLEY GARDNER'S books have outsold those of every other mystery writer in the country. In 1943 alone his sales hit the astronomical figure of more than 4,000,000 copies. Gardner has developed no spectacular secret formula that insures his popularity. But his success certainly rests in part on two facts—that before he became a mystery writer par excellence he had a spectacular career as a trial lawyer and that he has an extraordinary fertile imagination. His books are distinguished by an unflinching authenticity of background and character and by an amazing variety in plot.

That Gardner's mysteries provide his ever-expanding public with more than their money's worth of entertainment is to be expected. That they are also avidly read by lawyers and criminologists, and that in at least one authenticated case gave a State's Attorney a tip which resulted in the conviction of a murderer, is a tribute to his thorough knowledge of criminal law and the validity of his characters and situations.

Gardner is a prolific writer and turns out an average of three books a year, innumerable short stories, articles, and other literary work. He dictates to three secretaries via the dictaphone. But tremendous energy and technical skill are not enough to put over a mystery writer. Gardner also has the feel for a popular character. His most famous sleuth, Perry Mason, and scarcely less famous Doug Selby and Gramp Wiggins, have the touch of Everyman about them. They are not esoteric highbrows, but hard-headed, slightly sentimental men—Americans to the core. Gardner was born in Malden, Mass., in 1889; was a lawyer at 21; now lives on a ranch at Temecula, Cal.



# THE CASE OF THE CROOKED CANDLE

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER



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WASHINGTON SQUARE, PHILADELPHIA



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## The Case of the Crooked Candle



"I have," Drake said . . . he gave the facts on the firm. Daphne Milfield opened the door.

PERRY MASON, the lawyer-investigator, was pacing his Los Angeles office Saturday morning when Paul Drake of the Drake Detective Agency came in. Secretary Della Street poised her pencil.

"About that fur company you asked me to investigate," Drake asked, "why the sudden interest?"

"I might want to buy a fur coat," Mason said. "Have you learned anything of the Skinner Hills Karakul firm?"

"I have," Drake said. Briefly, he gave the facts about the mysterious firm on which Mason had requested a check. Paunchy Fred Milfield was the front man. "He and his wife, Daphne, live at 2291 West Narlian Avenue. A man named

Harry Van Nuys of the Hotel Cornish is his principal salesman. They've been buying up land in the Skinner Hills for sheep raising. The money-man back of it all is a chap named Burbank. What are you after?"

"I want to sell them eighty acres of sheep land for about a hundred thousand bucks," Mason said. "It's owned by my client, Adelaide Kingman. She thinks it's so worthless she won't even evict a squatter. But I smell oil!"

Drake whistled. Mason said, "I'm going to Milfield's apartment." He nodded to Della Street. "Stick around."

Fifteen minutes later when Mason pushed the button the door was opened by Daphne Milfield. There was a pecul-



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iarly puffy look about her eyes. "My husband isn't here," she said. But at the mention of Karakul fur, she stepped back. "Come in."

He could tell now that she had been crying. She sat down and said, "May I ask why you're here?"

Mason said, "Look, I want you to give your husband a message. Tell him I have been smelling around the Skinner Hills and what I smell isn't fur. Can you remember that?"



**"If you're connected with a murder—think fast!"**

Abruptly she said, "Mr. Mason, I'm going to confide in you. I need you. I—I'm going to tell you something." She paused, seemed to brace herself, inhaled a deep breath as one does who is starting a rush of words.

The ringing of the telephone bell froze the first of those words on her lips. Her embarrassment was sufficiently evident so Mason couldn't resist saying, "Perhaps that's your husband now."

She bit at her lip, moved uneasily in her chair. The telephone rang once more. She obviously was debating whether it would be more awkward to let it ring on or to accept an unwelcome call in Mason's presence.

"Excuse me," she murmured, and took the call. When she hung up her voice was perplexed. "A Lieutenant Tragg is on his way up," she said. "I don't even know him. I suppose he's some lonely soldier who..."

Mason was on his feet. "Lieutenant Tragg is on the homicide squad," he snapped. "If you're connected with a murder, Mrs. Milfield, you'd better think fast!" He saw blank dismay in her eyes.

"Who's been murdered?"

"Good heavens. No one, except perhaps my..."

She checked herself. "Husband?" Mason pressed. She was silent. He seized her about the waist and propelled her



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Lieut. Tragg said, "It's okay. You can come out now."



"A young woman is here," Della said.

toward the kitchen. "You've been crying. Get some onions..."

Perry Mason stepped into the pantry as he heard Lieutenant Tragg ring the bell. The lawyer-detective, in his hiding place, could make out the sound of voices and then he heard Mrs. Milfield scream. A few minutes later the pantry door suddenly was jerked open.

Lieutenant Tragg said, "It's okay. You can come out."

"Thanks," Mason said nonchalantly. He grinned at Tragg. "Who's the victim this time?" he asked.

"Mrs. Milfield's husband has been murdered," Tragg said. "I don't suppose *you* know anything about it."

"Where did it happen?" Mason asked.

"By a technicality it's within the city limits."

"Makes it nice," Mason observed. "Gives you something to do. Who did it?"

"We don't know."

"Sounds interesting. How did you know I was in the pantry?"

Mrs. Milfield's voice was syrup smooth. "I told him you were here," she said. "I explained that you had called on another matter but when I found out what it was all about, I thought I'd better tell him."

Lieutenant Tragg frowned and looked at Mrs. Milfield's swollen eyes and then at the onions in the sink. "It always pays to be absolutely frank with the police," he said.



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They were still talking when Mason left. The lawyer entered the corner drug-store and called his office. Della Street answered and Mason told her about the murder of Fred Milfield. "Tell Paul Drake to get on the job," he said, "contact the newspaper boys and see what they can find out about it. I'll be along."

Della was waiting for him. "A well-dressed young woman is here to see you. I explained you were busy but she seemed desperate. Her name's Carol Burbank..."



Carol gave a start. She said, "You've got to help us..."

"Any relation to the Karakul fur Burbank?"

"I didn't know. That's why I let her in. I think she is."

Mason whistled. "We'll talk with Carol Burbank," he agreed. "She seems

excited?"

"More than excited. She's white-faced with desperation."

"She's in the outer office?"

Della Street nodded.

"Okay," Mason said. "You go down to Paul Drake's office. Tell him to dig out the details on Milfield's murder. Tell him to get busy and let everything else go."

Della Street paused with her hand on the door. "How did Mrs. Milfield take it?" she asked.

Mason said, "I heard her scream. I don't think it was unexpected. She'd been crying when I go there."

"Clever?"

"She threw me to the wolves."

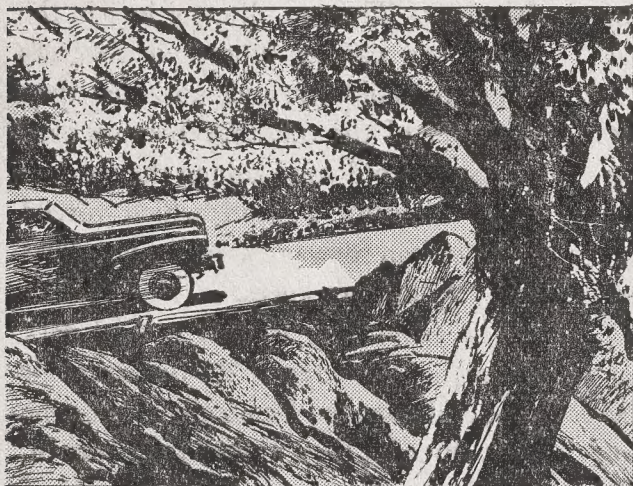
Carol Burbank was sitting very rigid, her knees pressed tightly together, her face a hard, white mask, her mouth a garish red streak. She gave a convulsive start as the latch clicked. "Mr. Mason," she

said, "you've got to help us. Fred Milfield, an associate of my father, has been murdered—aboard my father's yacht..."

Lovely Carol Burbank looked appealingly at Perry Mason. "My father is in a very precarious position," she said.



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Mason and Carol headed out of town.



He followed her into the office . . .

"He was aboard the yacht at the time Fred Milfield was murdered there?"

"Heavens no! That's the trouble. He wanted people to *think* he was aboard the yacht, but actually he wasn't there at *all*. You must represent him."

"Sorry," Mason said. "I can't. I have an adverse interest." He mentioned the land owned by Adelaide Kingman and the fact that he suspected Roger Burbank of seeking oil on it. "My client wants a hundred thousand dollars."

Her eyes were steady. "Look here," she said, "let that ride. You represent Father and when you meet him drive the best bargain you can."

Mason smiled cheerfully. "It'll be hard but all right. What do you want me to

do?"

"I want you to go to Father with me. We've simply got to find him."

It was while they were in the big Burbank automobile, heading out of town, that Carol Burbank, at the wheel, told Mason of her wealthy father's position. "Fred Milfield was murdered on the yacht last night," she said. "Dad usually goes out every Friday night and anchors in the estuary—just for a rest. This Friday he took the yacht out but he didn't stay there. He's working on something so big he'd never admit to *anyone* what he was doing."

It was, she hinted, a secret political deal which had called Burbank from his yacht before Milfield's murder. Carol said, "If



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the police reach him first, they'll trap him into declaring he stayed out on the boat yesterday."

The car topped the slight incline above the Conejo Grade, then went rushing down the mountain. She looked at her wrist watch. "I hope we'll be in time." Mason said nothing. Then she slowed and pulled into a "motel."

"Do we get out?" Mason asked. At her affirmative nod he followed her into the office of the manager.



Carol picked up the razor and said, "It's Father's!"

"You have a Mr. J. C. Lassing registered here?" she asked.

The manager looked at her register. "Cottage fourteen. There's a party of five."

They walked down a crunching gravel

driveway. The sun, dipping low in the west, was casting elongated shadows along the buildings, and, now that they were out of the car, they became conscious of a cold wind lashing the channel into whitecaps, a wind which forced Carol to lean forward, pressing her skirts down against her knees.

The cabin they wanted seemed dark and silent. Carol ran up the three cement steps and pounded frantically against the door. Finally, they pushed their way in.

Carol looked at the litter of cold cigar butts, empty bottles and glasses.

"They're gone," she said. "Let's take a look through the rooms for baggage." She led the way and found the shaving brush and razor on the bathroom shelf. She picked it up and exclaimed, "It's Father's!"

Mason stared at Carol Burbank as she stood there with the safety razor and shaving brush. "Perhaps your father's coming back," he said.

"No his bag's gone. He just forgot these. Do you think I should clean them?"

"Not if you think it's important to establish the fact that he was here," Mason



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"Here," she said, "you'll need this."



"Dad," Carol cried. "What are you doing here?"

said. "The razor might be a bit of corroborative evidence. Microscopic examination of hairs."

Her face lit up. "You're right," she exclaimed.

Mason observed, "You could rent this place for the next week and insist it be left exactly as it is. You don't see a key around, do you?"

They searched the place and could find no key. "Where do you suppose your father is now?" he asked. Her eyes showed panic at the question. "He's gone back to the yacht," she said in dismay. "Police will be waiting . . ."

Mason held the door open for her and watched appreciatively as the ocean wind whipped her skirts about her shapely legs.

"You talk to the manager," she said. "Here, you'll need this for expenses." She pushed a sheaf of bills into his hand. He looked down. They were twenty-dollar bills and the wrapper said five hundred dollars.

The manager gladly accepted the next week's rent and promised that Cabin 14 would not be disturbed. A few minutes later, Carol and Perry Mason were speeding along the road back toward Los Angeles. Carol said, "There's a restaurant ahead where my father usually eats when he's on the road. There's a chance we might find him there."

A hostess dressed in a Spanish dancing costume was leading them to a table when Carol gave a half exclamation and veered



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toward a corner. A powerfully-built man with a gray mustache smiled at her. "Hello, Dad!" she said. "What on earth are you doing here?"

Two other men with Burbank got to their feet. The financier gripped Perry Mason's hand. Mason said, "And Lieutenant Tragg. Permit me to introduce Carol Burbank, Lieutenant. I take it this other gentleman is from Homicide?"

"George Avon," Tragg admitted. And then, after a moment, as though debating

Burbank raised his eyebrows. "My reinforcements?"

"Your attorney."

Burbank said, "I'm afraid there's some mistake. I didn't send for Mr. Mason."

"Haven't you told him yet?" Carol demanded of Tragg.

"I want to get this straight, Mr. Burbank," Tragg said. "Where were you yesterday afternoon and evening?"

Mason said suavely, "Fred Milfield was murdered aboard your yacht."

Tragg made a gesture of irritation. "That's what comes of trying to be polite," he said. "I should have taken you to headquarters the minute I walked in..."

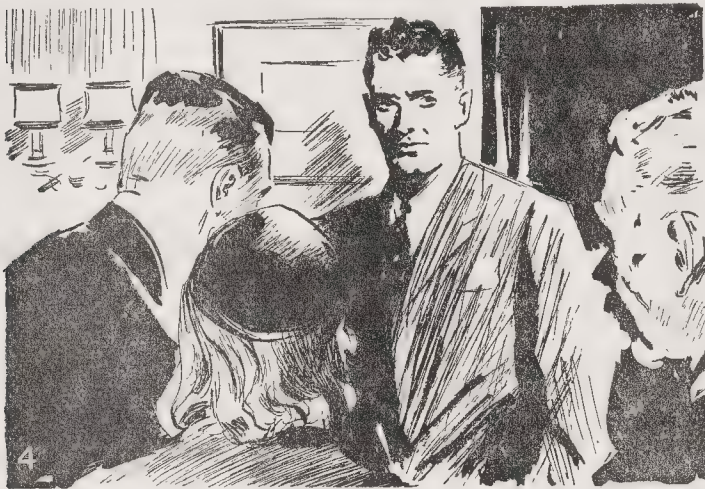
At mention of Milfield's fate, Roger Burbank leaned forward. "*Fred Milfield murdered!*" he said. "I simply can't understand it."

Carol Burbank broke in impatiently. She told Lieutenant Tragg how her father had

attended a secret conference and of how she had found the razor in the cabin.

Tragg said dryly, "Any other evidence?"

Carol said, "Dad, didn't you carry the key away?"



Mason said, "Milfield was murdered on your yacht."

whether to disclose the information, he added, "fingerprint expert."

Tragg glared at Mason for a moment, then said dryly, "It didn't take your reinforcements long to get here, did it, Burbank?"



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"Give the check to the wise guy . . ."



Della was asleep. Mason looked at her tenderly.

Slowly Roger Burbank slipped his hand into the pocket of his coat and pulled out a typical hotel key. Tragg took the key and pushed back his chair. He signaled the waiter. "Cancel our orders," he said, "and give the check to the wise guy." He jabbed an angry finger at Mason.

It was after eleven o'clock Saturday night when Mason entered his office. Della Street was seated at Mason's desk, her head pillowed on her arm. She was fast asleep and he stood for a moment looking down at her with tender solicitude before touching her shoulder.

"Don't you ever go home?" he asked.

Della wakened with a start. "I had to know what happened," she said. Mason

told her of the ride with Carol Burbank to the Motel and of the meeting with Roger Burbank and Lieutenant Tragg. "I've got my tongue in my cheek," he said. "It was all beautifully done." He showed her the five hundred dollars expense money. "The banks close at noon Saturday."

"You mean Carol drew the expense money before she was supposed to know about the murder?"

"Exactly. But I'm not saying it was all faked."

Della Street handed him a neatly type-written sheet. "It's Paul Drake's report about the Milfield murder," she said. Mason read the summary rapidly. It stated that Fred Milfield and Harry Van



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Nuys somehow had gotten Burbank to finance the Skinner Hills "sheep project." Van Nuys, not yet found by police, was at the Cornish Hotel.

"The murder was committed aboard Burbank's yacht sometime early Friday evening," the report said. "It's a sailing yacht about thirty-five feet in length, and Burbank uses it as a means of escape, not to cruise in. He usually goes out Friday nights, and at high tide goes in on the mud flats and amuses himself spearing sharks.



Concluding Drake's report, Mason grabbed the phone.

When the tide begins to go out he anchors in the channel, reads books, studies and loafs.

"Occasionally a chap named Beltin, who is his right-hand man, comes out to relay some message of importance. Once

or twice Milfield has gone out to the yacht. Once he brought Van Nuys with him. Burbank is a crank about sails. There isn't even an auxiliary motor on the boat. Lighting is by candle. The body was found against the starboard side of the cabin, but there is evidence to indicate the murder took place on the port side of the cabin and when the boat went aground at low tide, the body rolled over. A single, crushing blow caused death.

"A major clue was the print of a *woman's* shoe outlined in blood in the center of the companion-way step," Drake's report concluded. Mason grabbed the telephone . . .

When Drake came on the telephone line, Mason said, "Make a note of this, Paul. J. C. Lassing is supposed to have rented Cabin 14 at the Surf and Sun Motel. I'd like to know a lot more about him."

"All right. I'll get busy."

"I'm just reading your report," Mason said. "Who discovered the body, Paul?"

Mason was surprised when Detective Drake revealed that the discoverer of the body was Frank Palermo, the squatter on the property of his client, Adelaide King-



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Della said, "A notebook might come in handy . . ."



"I've heard of you," Van Nuys said.

man. But in a way the connection was apparent. Milfield or Burbank must have been in touch with Palermo in trying to buy the property.

"Here's something else," Drake said. "Harry Van Nuys told the clerk at his hotel that if he hadn't stopped Mrs. Milfield from going to San Francisco yesterday afternoon she'd have been in a sweet mess by this time. My man was hanging around the lobby and heard the remark."

"Nice going, Paul. I'll see what he has to say about it." Mason hung up and pushed the phone to one side. He said to Della Street, "You're going home and sleep."

His secretary smiled, opened her purse and calmly applied lipstick. "Not if

you're going to beat the police to seeing Harry Van Nuys," she said. "A notebook might come in handy there."

The Hotel Cornish was on the fringe of the business district. Harry Van Nuys was waiting after their call from the lobby. He welcomed them in a voice that was suave, pleasant, well modulated and expressive. The restless eyes were black and his movements were graceful. "I've heard of you, Mr. Mason. Daphne told me you had called."

"Daphne Milfield?" Mason asked. Then abruptly, "Why did she change her mind about flying to San Francisco yesterday afternoon?"

"How did you know about that?"

"I'm investigating Milfield's murder."



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Mason said. "I think that canceled trip might have some bearing."

Van Nuys was thoughtfully silent for a long time. Finally he blurted out: "Do you know anything about Daphne, about her background? She's peculiar. She's emotionally unstable."

"What does that mean?"

"She's subject to certain emotional vagaries."

"Are you trying to tell me in a nice way that she's a tramp?" Mason asked.



He handed a paper to Mason . . .

"No, no—definitely not. She's—she's more of an emotional gypsy."

"Well, she's subject to devastating emotional storms. I'm only the shoulder she cries on. The man this time was a chap in San Francisco. She had decided

to burn her bridges. She had left Fred the usual note that the husband receives under such circumstances, and was about to leave for San Francisco, join her lover and let Fred get a divorce, or do anything else he damn pleased. I found her note and intercepted her at the airport."

Van Nuys opened a briefcase, took out a paper and handed it to Mason . . .

Perry Mason read the note which Mrs. Milfield had left for her husband. Simply, she stated her love for "Doug" and asked

Fred Milfield to go ahead with divorce proceedings.

"It's a nice note," Mason said.

"Who's Doug?"

Harry Van Nuys, the former business partner of the slain Milfield, smiled and shook his head. "Really, Mr. Mason. There is a limit."

Explaining his discovery of Mrs. Milfield's note, Van Nuys said her husband had asked him to go to the Milfield home to pick up a brief

case containing "certain papers."

"Just in case Daphne wasn't home, he gave me his key to the place," Van Nuys explained. "He thought that Daphne might be out shopping or something."

"Why didn't Milfield get the papers



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Mason took out several letters . . .

himself?"

"He had an important luncheon engagement."

"Do you know why he wanted the papers?"

"They were papers he wanted to show Mr. Burbank. Mr. Burbank was expecting him—aboard his yacht."

"Suppose it should develop that Roger Burbank wasn't aboard the yacht Friday afternoon, and had no intention of being there?"

Van Nuys smiled and shook his head. "I think you'll find such is not the case, Mr. Mason."

Mason said, "The police will smoke all this out. Did this 'Doug' ever write her?"

"There are no letters the police will



"He sounds like a nice boy," Della said.

ever find."

Abruptly, Mason rose. He reached over and took Van Nuys' briefcase. "You mean you have them?" He took out several letters and pocketed them.

"What are you going to do with those?"

"I'm going to study them," Mason said. "Good night."

The lawyer and his pretty secretary sat in Mason's car and by the dashboard light read the letters which Douglas Burwell of San Francisco had written to Mrs. Milfield. "He sounds like a nice boy," Della said. "He's naive and an idealist. They'd be unhappy. Van Nuys was right."

Mason said, "Let's see what Burwell has to say for himself. We'll call him long



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distance but I'll bet he's here." Mason was correct. A call brought word that Douglas Burwell was in Los Angeles at the Hotel Claymore. They drove over. The hotel room door was opened by Burwell who proved to be a tall man about thirty with a somewhat tubercular appearance.

The ash tray was overflowing with cigarettes. Burwell's voice showed the emotional tension under which he was laboring, and his manner had none of the cordial hospitality which had character-

man in the stomach, his reactions could not have indicated greater dismay. Burwell said, "About, about..."

"About Mrs. Milfield." Mason kicked the door shut and indicated a chair. "Sit down, Della."

Perry Mason's exchange with Douglas Burwell was short and sharp. Resistance oozed from the man like air from a punctured tire when he saw the letters.

"My letters!" Burwell exclaimed. "Where did you get those letters, Mr. Mason?"

"I can't tell you. But they're going to the police."

"Mr. Mason, *please* don't ... the newspapers..."

"I have no right to keep from the police evidence connecting you with the murder of Fred Milfield. He was aboard Burbank's yacht. You went there, hit him and—"

"Stop," Burwell said. "You have no grounds for such a statement." There was misery

in his eyes.

"All right," Mason said. "When you learned Mrs. Milfield wasn't coming to see you, you came here. You called her. What did she say?"

"Well," Burwell blurted, "she told me



Burwell was tense. He demanded, "Well, what is it?"

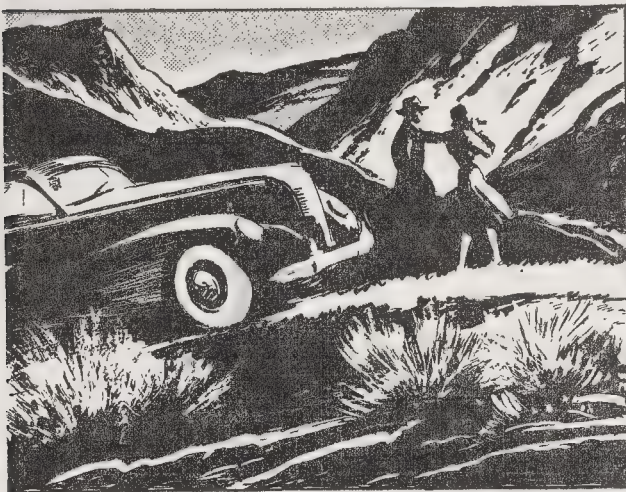
ized Harry Van Nuys.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded shortly.

Mason lashed out without any preliminaries. "I want to ask you some questions about Mrs. Milfield." If he had struck the



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Mason let Della watch through the binoculars . . .



Palermo said, "I got license."

her husband had been killed and that I mustn't try to see her." Mason veiled his glance at Della Street. "What time was that?"

"About 10 a.m. Saturday. I came down on the Lark."

"I see," Mason said carelessly, thinking that it was nearer 1 p.m., that Lieutenant Tragg had informed Daphne Milfield of the murder. "Did she give some details?"

"Just that the body had been found on the yacht."

It was late when Della Street and Perry Mason left. The next morning, Sunday, Mason picked Della up in his car and they drove out to the Skinner Hills. Mason stopped the car at a summit and let Della watch sheep on a hillside through the

binoculars. He said, "Now we'll find Frank Palermo and see just what he knows—if he'll talk."

A short drive brought them to an unpainted shack. Palermo, a thick-chested man, flung open the cabin door belligerently. But he became affable on learning Mason's identity. Without hesitation, he revealed that Fred Milfield had offered him a thousand dollar cash bonus for his land. Mason listened eagerly when Palermo said still another man had arrived Friday, checked Milfield's offer and hinted that he would pay \$5,000.

"He don't want to tell me his name," Palermo said, "but I got license." He read it from a scrap of paper—8P3035.

"What about Saturday morning?"



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Mason asked.

Palermo's little suspicious eyes narrowed. "Saturday morning! Is nothing. I go aboard yacht to see Milfield. Is dead. That's all."

"How did you know that Milfield was to be aboard that yacht?"

"Because he tell me he is going to be there."

"You telephoned Milfield?"

"That's right."

"Did you tell him about this other man

kept to take hunters out on the lake. When Mason asked if he had left fingerprints on the yacht Palermo became wildly angry. "You make trap," he shouted. "Get off my property. I get shotgun."

Perry Mason watched Palermo turn and plunge along toward his cabin. "Better get started before he comes out with that shotgun," Della urged.

Mason said, "I'd like to see whether he *does* bring out a gun." But when Palermo

did not reappear, Mason slid behind the wheel. Della asked if he wanted Paul Drake to check the license number of Palermo's mysterious visitor.

"I recognized it," Mason said. "The car's the one in which Carol Burbank took me to the Motel yesterday!"

It was late afternoon when Della and Mason got back to the office. Drake came in. "There's something new on that murder," he said. "The

autopsy surgeon thinks that Milfield *may* have received the fatal injury by being knocked over against the brass threshold of the cabin."

The phone rang. It was for Drake. When he hung up the receiver he told



"I get shotgun," Palermo yelled as he ran.

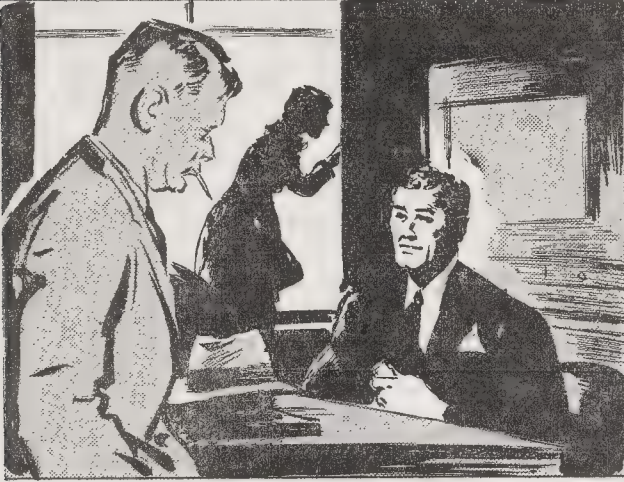
seeing you?"

"Sure I tell him. Milfield say to come to see him tomorrow on yacht. Is all excited quick."

Palermo said he had rowed out to the yacht in his own folding boat, which he



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Drake said, "There's something new on that murder."

Police nabbed J. C. Lassing . . .

Mason, "We've located J. C. Lassing, the man who rented that cabin at the Motel. My operative's got him parked outside the drugstore where he's calling. He thinks Lassing will sign a statement."

Mason showed excitement. "What does he say?"

"He just about corroborates Burbank's story. He says he rented two double cabins; that there were four people in his party and that he 'believes there were subsequently two more people who arrived.' He won't tell the names of any of them."

The operatives had called before trying to get a written statement, Drake said, because Lassing mentioned casually that his party checked out right after noon

Saturday.

"Burbank apparently didn't leave until around four or five o'clock in the afternoon," Mason said. "Have your man check the time element carefully."

Instantly, the phone rang again and Della answered. It was Carol Burbank calling from the Union Terminal. "She wants to know if you've found out anything."

"Get her number and tell her to wait," Mason snapped. "Clear the line."

They waited in tense silence and the phone rang a third time. Drake talked, then told Mason, "The cops nabbed Lassing! They came up and slipped handcuffs on him while my man was calling us."



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"Tell your man to get out of there fast!"

Mason, pacing the floor, quickened his stride. He said, "Have you got a good woman operative, Paul?" Drake said it would take several hours to line one up. "We haven't got all night," Mason said.

"Can I do it?" Della Street asked.

Mason turned to contemplate her. "You'll have to. Now here's what to do. Be certain you aren't followed. Grab a cab and tell the driver, he'll know what

from me."

A minute later, Della was in a cab careening through traffic . . .

Della found Carol Burbank standing near the telephone booth in the Union Terminal. "Hello," Carol said with a quick smile and outstretched hand. "Mr. Mason telephoned you'd be down."

Della Street nodded. "He's given me some definite instructions. Where's your father?" When Carol said she didn't know, Della asked, "Did he go to Skinner Hills Friday and talk with Frank Palermo?"

"Friday afternoon? Of course not. That was the day of the political meeting at the Motel."

Della said, "Well, you're to come with me. I think we'd better take a cab." They started toward the taxi stand. Carol opened her purse and pulled out a pair of gloves. As she did so, a slip of pasteboard fluttered from the purse.

Della glanced at Carol and saw the latter had failed to notice the pasteboard. A smiling man rushed forward, raised his hat and extended the slip. Della took it, saw it was a parcel claim check for the depot stand and pushed it down into her



A minute later, Della was in a cab.

to do. Beat it to the Union Terminal, pick up Carol Burbank and take her to the Woodridge Hotel. Register under your own name and register Carol under hers but use only her initials. Get connecting rooms and wait until you hear



# The Case of the Crooked Candle



A slip of pasteboard fluttered from Carol's purse . . . Della phoned Mason about the check.

pocket. Abruptly, she said, "Just a minute. I want to call the boss about something."

"I'll come along," Carol said.

"There's nothing that you want to get here at the depot, is there?" Della asked her.

"No."

"No baggage or anything?"

"Heavens, no! I just came down here because it was a good place to telephone and one can always find a cab here. These days it isn't easy to pick up a cab when you want one."

Della Street popped into a telephone booth, leaving Carol Burbank standing outside. She dialed the unlisted number of the phone on Mason's desk.

"Listen, Chief," she said, "Carol opened her purse and dropped a claim check. She must have left that package within the last hour or two . . ."

"All right," Mason said. "Slip it into an envelope and write my name on it. When you get to the hotel, leave the envelope at the desk. I'll pick it up, get the parcel and see what's in it. Got that straight?"

"Yes. Bye, Chief." Della hung up, then moved around on the stool so that her shoulder hid what she was doing. She slipped an envelope out of her purse and scribbled Mason's name and the office address on it and inserted the pasteboard.

She rejoined Carol and the two girls hurried to the taxi stand. They moved



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forward as a vacant cab drew up to the curb. "Where to?" the starter asked.

Della said, "We're both together. It's the Woodridge Hotel."

"Sorry, we're not putting two people in a cab any more. You'll have to double up with . . . Where to, Mister?"

A man's voice said, "I want to go to Eleventh and Figueroa."

"All right, get in," the starter said, and then instructed the driver, "Take the young ladies to the Woodridge Hotel and

ways anxious to get back."

Affably, he kept up a running line of small talk until the cab drew up in front of the Woodridge Hotel. "I'm sorry your hotel wasn't nearer Eleventh and Figueroa," he said. "Well, good-by."

Della led the way into the hotel. At the desk, she registered and said to Carol, "I'll register for you. What's your middle name?"

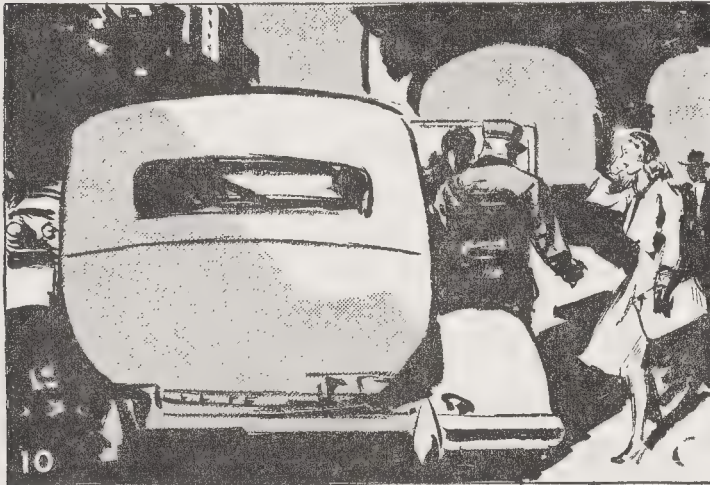
"Edith, but I seldom use it."

"That's all right," Della said, and wrote the name C. E. Burbank on the register. The clerk smacked his palm on the bell and called, "Front!"

Della slipped the envelope containing the claim check out of her purse and placed it on the counter. "A message for Mr. Mason," she said. "He'll pick it up . . ."

A man who had just entered the lobby walked rapidly toward the desk. "Just a minute," he said. Della didn't

like the tone of his voice. She turned apprehensively as a big hand pulled back the lapel of a coat. She saw a gold shield incrust with a number, insignia and lettering. The affable stranger of the cab was no longer friendly.



The girls moved forward. "Where to?" the starter asked.

the man to Eleventh and Figueroa . . ."

The man climbed into the cab with Della Street and Carol Burbank. After two blocks, he said, "You girls from San Francisco?" They said, "No." "I live there," he went on. "Swell place. Al-



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Della said, "I'll register; what's your middle name?"



His big hand clamped down . . .

He pushed Della slightly to one side and his big hand clamped down on the envelope. Della said angrily, "Will you kindly explain the meaning of this?"

His eyes were steely. "You two girls have an appointment at Headquarters." He turned to a plainclothes man who had come up behind him. "Keep an eye on them, Mac, while I see what's in this envelope of theirs."

Mac moved close while the first officer pulled out the claim check. He said, "I'll get it, Mac. You take the girls to Headquarters."

"I want to call my lawyer," Della Street said.

"Sure, sure," the man said soothingly, "but you can't do it here. You don't

want the whole hotel to know your business, do you? Come on. There's a phone at Headquarters. You'll have all the time in the world to call him from there."

"I want to call him from here," Della said, starting toward the phone booths.

The officer's hand grasped her arm. He spun her around. "All right, if you have to do it the hard way," he said. "This is a pinch . . ."

At Police Headquarters the two women found themselves in a room that had barred windows, a clean, somewhat battered table, nearly a dozen chairs, three huge brass cuspidors on rubber mats, and nothing else. Between them and the door sat a police officer.

"I demand that I be permitted to com-



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municate with my attorney right now," Della Street said firmly. "Perry Mason might even prefer charges against you for failing to take me before the nearest magistrate without delay."

"Say, wait a minute," the officer mumbled. He went out and a moment later he told them, "The Lieutenant will see you now."

Lieutenant Tragg sat at a plain oak desk as Della Street and Carol Burbank were ushered in. Della said, "I want to tele-

"Bosh!" Della said. "I registered her own name."

"It was done very cleverly," Tragg said, "but it was done to conceal this witness. And I can hold you for attempting to conceal evidence." It was apparent police had worked fast while Della and Carol were held in an anteroom for Tragg now opened a desk drawer and whipped out a pair of woman's shoes. "Perry Mason instructed Miss Burbank to leave these shoes at the Union Terminal," he said. "She passed the claim check to you."

"What's wrong with those shoes?" Della asked calmly.

Tragg picked up a magnifying glass and examined a section of the shoe just above the sole. "There's nothing *wrong*," he said. "Those shoes..."

The door abruptly jerked open, Mason pushed his way into the room, "That will be about all, Lieutenant. As at-

torney for these young women I demand they be taken before the nearest magistrate. Judge Roxmann is waiting."

Tragg sighed wearily. "All right," he said. But as they stalked out, he added, "She'll be back before midnight."



The officer spun her around. He said, "This is a pinch."

phone Mr. Mason."

Tragg said, "Now, listen. I don't want to pick on you, Miss Street, but you and Perry Mason have been trying to suppress evidence and spirit Miss Burbank away."



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Tragg said, "There's nothing wrong. Those shoes . . ."



"That will be all," Mason said.

At his office Mason told Carol Burbank, "Start talking. Try telling the truth for a change."

Carol told then that there was a shadow on her father's life about which Daphne Milfield knew. She had used it to make Burbank back Milfield and Van Nuys on the Skinner Hills oil deal. But then Burbank discovered that Milfield was swindling him by claiming to buy land at much higher prices than he actually paid. Burbank had visited Palermo on Friday and verified the swindle.

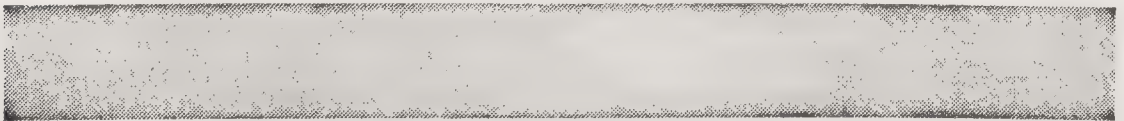
"Father was terribly angry," she said. "He tried to get in touch with Milfield, then left word for Milfield to telephone him at the yacht club. Milfield got Father on the phone late Friday morning. Father

told him just what he'd discovered. You see, Father could have terminated Milfield's connection with any future profit if he could prove fraud and embezzlement, and Milfield was in a panic."

"What did he say?"

"He said that he would bring Palermo down to the yacht and make him admit he was lying. Of course that didn't fool Father any. Father knew Palermo could be bribed to say anything. Milfield went aboard the yacht late Friday afternoon. He tried to bluster and threaten and took a punch at Father and Father knocked him down, then took the dinghy ashore to have him arrested."

She went on, "He called me. I persuaded him to wait until we knew what





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shape Milfield was in. I went out and found Milfield dead, his head near that threshold."

"Why didn't you notify the police?"

"I couldn't. Years ago in New Orleans Father had a fight with a man who fell against an andiron and was killed . . ."

As Carol Burbank told of her father's past in which he accidentally had killed a man in a fist fight, Perry Mason began pacing the floor. Carol said, "I worked out that scheme of giving him an alibi."



Carol had gone to the yacht and found Milfield dead.

Carol said her father "almost killed himself that night" upon learning of Milfield's death.

"I knew that Lassing and a party were at the Motel," Carol said. "He'd telephoned, trying to talk to Father. Justin

Beltin and I went to the Motel to catch Lassing before he'd checked out, but Lassing had gone.

"Beltin paid the rent for another day, pretending he was one of Lassing's party and we planted the razor and stuff. Beltin rang the police and gave them an anonymous tip so they'd find Father in the restaurant. You know how he pulled out the key at the psychological moment."

"You *almost* made it stick," Mason said. "But let's get back to what happened at the yacht. How soon after his trouble with Milfield did *you* get there?"

"It was an hour or so, still daylight. Milfield was on the floor of the cabin, his head within an inch of that brass-covered threshold."

"It wasn't there when the police found it."

"I know, the boat tilted when the tide went out and the body rolled over to the starboard side."

"How about that bloody footprint?"

"I didn't know I'd stepped in the blood until I'd started up the stairs. When I saw what had happened, I took my shoes off." Carol added that she had tried vainly to wash the blood from the shoe



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Mason asked, "How about that bloody footprint?"



He told Drake to check detectives . . .

and finally had left them in the terminal.

"And the boat was on an even keel and the body of Milfield hadn't been moved when you got there?" When Carol said that that was correct, Mason said, "There *has* to be a way out of this mess. Someone handed that claim check to Della. What did he look like?"

Carol described the man as around fifty. He was of medium height, broad-shouldered and wore a gray suit. His nose was broad as if once broken.

Mason got Drake on the wire. He said, "I want the dope on any police detectives connected with homicide—especially a man who might have been a prize-fighter, about fifty, broken nose, medium height, broad-shouldered."

"What's so important about him?" Drake asked.

"I've got to show the police pushed this claim check into Della's hand. Make a police frame-up out of it."

Peremptory knuckles banged on the door. Mason pulled it open. Lieutenant Tragg and a uniformed officer stood there. Tragg's smile was confident. "I told you I'd be back for her, Mason," he said. "We're ready to make a charge."

Mason said to Carol, "Okay, sister, this is it."

She said, "Please find Father and . . ."

"Don't be silly," Mason said. "The reason Tragg is ready to put a charge against you is that he's . . ."

"Got your father," Tragg interrupted.

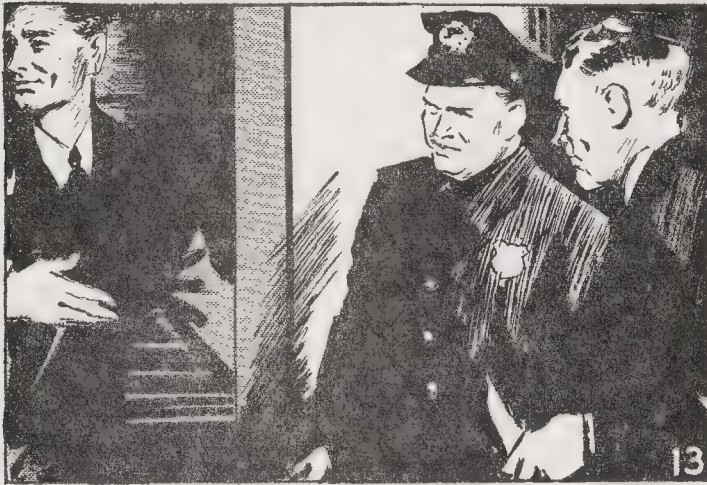


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"Exactly," Mason said . . .

Judge Newark presided at the preliminary hearing of Roger Burbank and Carol Burbank. The defendants sat with Della Street, close to Perry Mason at the front of the crowded courtroom. Hamilton Burger, the district attorney, was present in person and the prosecution began by stating it would prove Roger Burbank guilty of murder and Carol guilty of suborning perjury.

Quickly, the first witnesses produced



Tragg and an officer stood there.

maps showing the location of the yacht anchored in the estuary and photographs of the interior and of the body. Mason seemed elaborately casual in his cross-examination and he did not change when Mrs. Daphne Milfield took the stand. She

was attired in black and her eyes were still swollen from weeping. She testified she had known Burbank for ten years.

Burger asked her, "Do you know whether Roger Burbank asked your husband to meet him at any designated place on the day your husband met his death?"

"Yes. Mr. Burbank telephoned."

"When?"

"About eleven-thirty that morning."

"Who answered the telephone?"

"I did."

"And did you recognize the voice of Roger Burbank?"

"I did."

"The voice which you have known for some ten years?"

"Yes."

"And what did Mr. Burbank say?"

"When he found Fred wasn't there, he said he was anxious to get in touch with him, that he wanted Fred to come aboard his yacht for a

conference at five o'clock that afternoon. He said it was a matter of the greatest importance."

Burger said, "You may cross-examine."

Mason nodded. Though well aware of the district attorney's ruse to get Bur-



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Daphne testified, "Mr. Burbank telephoned me . . ."



She flashed a glance at Burger.

bank's former trouble before the court, he said, "You say you have known Roger Burbank for ten years?" Mrs. Milfield's "Yes" was hardly audible.

"Where did you get acquainted?"

"In New Orleans. I did some yachting and Mr. Burbank was an enthusiastic yachtsman. We met that way. I was rowing a skiff and Mr. Burbank in another rowboat started racing me." It was through her, she admitted, that Milfield had met Burbank when she telephoned the financier after an interval of some years.

"You mentioned your old acquaintanceship?" A look of satisfaction was on the district attorney's face as Mrs. Milfield said that she had.

"Just what did you say to him, Mrs. Milfield?"

She flashed a glance at the district attorney and received in return what might have been a signal. The judge frowned as she answered very rapidly, "I took pains to assure him that I would say nothing about the trouble he had been in in New Orleans when he had killed a man with a blow of his fist . . ."

Mrs. Milfield's testimony exposing Burbank's past left Perry Mason unruffled. Seemingly casual questions drew from the witness the fact that she had revealed that past to her husband and to Harry Van Nuys who had then gone to Burbank for backing. Mason pointed at her.



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"Did you remonstrate with your husband for blackmailing Roger Burbank into advancing him money, and . . ."

District Attorney Burger leaped to his feet to object but Mason had made his point. Mrs. Milfield was followed to the stand by J. C. Lassing. He testified that Carol Burbank had asked him to refuse to tell police who had been in his party at the Motel.

Mason took up the cross-examination. "Did she ask you to testify to anything

said, "I'll eat it."

Burger lashed out, "I'll prove it before I'm done." When Lieut. Tragg took the stand, the district attorney obtained testimony that Carol Burbank had *implied* her father was at the Motel and not on his yacht when the murder was committed. Burbank, he said, had identified a razor found in Cabin 14 at the Motel as his.

Mason's smile was suave. "Carol Burbank told you her father's razor was there?" Tragg said she had. Mason said, "Did she tell you that her father had been there?"

"Well, she inferred it."

"You mean you inferred it because of his razor?"

"Well, in a way, yes. If you're going to put it just that way."

"And did the defendant, Roger Burbank, tell you his razor was there?"

"Yes, subsequently."

"And was it his razor?"

Tragg seemed uncomfortable. "I don't know."

"I take it you will agree, Lieutenant, it's no crime for a man to put his razor any place he chooses?"

Tragg protested that "the inference was obvious," but Mason reminded him



They had first met at a New Orleans yacht club.

that was false?"

"No, she asked me to just keep quiet."

Mason smiled triumphantly as the witness said he had been asked, in fact, to deny that Burbank was in his party. "If that's suborning perjury," the lawyer





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"Did you remonstrate with your husband? . . ."



Burger lashed out, "I'll prove it—"

that a jury would prefer to try a case on "facts."

Switching his line of questioning, Mason said, "Now, when you were called to the yacht, you found the bloody imprint of a shoe on one of the companionway treads?"

"Yes," Tragg said, "such an imprint was left and it happens I have the shoe."

"Exactly," Mason said. "Now let's look at the photograph, People's Exhibit No. Five. I call your attention to a candle which appears in that photograph. Do you notice it?"

"I know there was a candle there."

"Well, take a good look," Mason said. "Study that candle."

"Yes sir, I see it."

"Is there anything about the appearance of that candle which impresses you as being unusual . . .?"

Lieut. Tragg stared at the picture of the candle. He said, "It is simply a candle fastened to the top of a table in the yacht where the body was found."

Mason said, "You'll notice that this candle is inclined somewhat from the perpendicular—about eighteen degrees. Have you made any attempt to account for this?"

Tragg smiled. "Only if the murderer used the candle to see in daylight and was too hurried to get it straight." He stepped down as Burger frowned at Mason.

"What's that crooked candle got to do with it?"



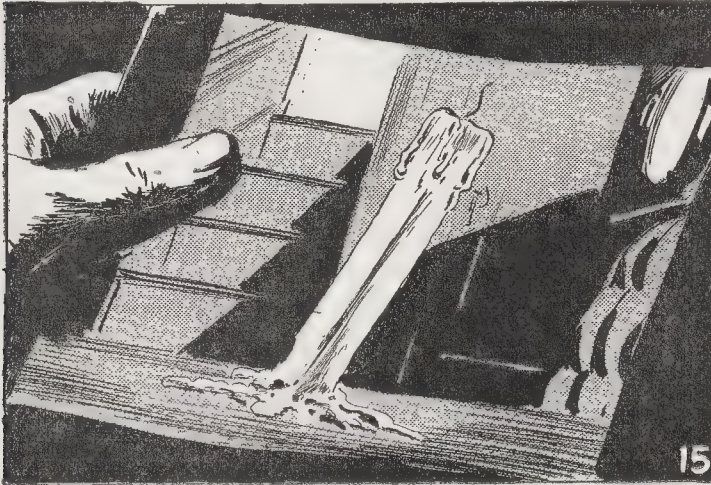


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Mason said, "That's my defense."

Arthur St. Claire was the next witness called. Della Street whispered to Mason, "That's the man who was in the cab with us. Watch him, he's clever."

St. Claire identified himself as a detective. He told of shadowing Carol Burbank, of confiscating the claim check and finding the bloodstained shoes. He looked with assurance at Mason as the cross-examination began. "Were you alone on that job?" Mason asked.



"Well, take a look," Mason said. "Study that candle."

The witness lost some of his assurance. "There was another man with me," he admitted. Relentlessly, Mason grilled him on the identity of the second detective, Harvey Teays, who had left on a sudden "vacation." The judge frowned as the

witness sought to evade Mason's questions hinting that Teays had handed the claim check to Della. St. Claire obviously was glad to get off the stand.

"Dr. Colfax C. Newbern," the prosecutor called.

Dr. Newbern told of examining the body on the yacht and later performing an autopsy. He testified that the victim had received a "very severe blow on the back of the head." There had been a very extensive hemorrhage. Milfield never had

regained consciousness and had died within five minutes.

"I discovered the body lying face up on the starboard side of the yacht," he said. "I noticed that under the head there was a pool of blood indicating an extensive hemorrhage. I also noticed that at another point in the cabin the carpet was saturated with blood." This stain was in front of the after cabin's doorway, the doctor said.

"Was there anything to indicate how the body might have been moved from the one spot, which we will refer to as number one, to the other, which we will refer to as position number two?" the prosecutor inquired.



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Burger said, "What's that candle got to do with it?"



Della whispered, "Watch him . . ."

"When we boarded the yacht, it was almost low tide," the doctor said. "That yacht had heeled way over. The boat was tilted so that the starboard side was the low side, and so far as the medical evidence is concerned, it is quite apparent that as the tide had gone out the night before, the body had rolled over into approximately the position in which it was found."

Dr. Newbern set the time of death as between five-seventeen and nine-seventeen Friday night. Mason, who had followed the questioning closely, asked if it was not possible that the victim could have been struck on the chin and thrown back against the threshold.

"That *could* have been the case," the

doctor agreed.

The next witness called was Thomas L. Cameron, a stocky, weather-beaten caretaker of the yacht club where Burbank kept his yacht. He said Burbank had taken his vessel out at 11:30 A.M. on the fatal Friday. Burbank returned in an hour, was gone all day and again went out to the yacht in the dinghy at 5 P.M.

"Did you see Fred Milfield that day?" Burger asked.

"Yes. He rented a rowboat from me at five-thirty."

"Did you see Burbank any more after that?"

"Yes. He came back in the dinghy about half an hour after Milfield left and drove away in his car. The next time I



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saw Mr. Milfield was Saturday morning. He was dead."

Mason's cross-examination was brisk. He got quickly to the subject of the tide which had caused the boat to go aground, tilt and roll the body. "On Friday night," he said, "do you know when the tide was high at that point?"

"Around five-forty. It was low three minutes past 12."

"Then if anyone was going to move the yacht it necessarily would have been

and given the alarm on Saturday. Mason asked if he'd rented any boats on that Friday night.

Cameron smiled, "I rented one row-boat to a man named Smith around nine o'clock. He said he wanted to study the nocturnal habits of sharks." Cameron said "Smith" was rather young, dark and obviously a greenhorn with a boat. He wore an overcoat which dragged in the boat and was gone until 10:20.

Judge Newark was interested. "You'd recognize this man if you saw him again?" Cameron said he would.

Establishing that Cameron had boarded the yacht with the police officers at eleven-fifteen Saturday morning, Mason asked the witness, "That was almost at dead low tide?"

"That lacked just about an hour and a half of being dead low tide," Cameron said. "The yacht was aground."

Mason drew from the witness the fact that if the murder took place in the evening there must have been, between the time of the murder and the discovery of the body, one other intervening low tide, at three minutes past twelve Saturday



Dr. Newbern had examined the body on the yacht.

within two hours of high tide? That would mean by seven-forty in the evening?"

"Well, you could have got off up until eight o'clock."

In answer to questions, Cameron told then how Palermo had found the body



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Cameron, the caretaker, took the stand . . .



"Smith" was a greenhorn with a boat.

morning, and one intervening high tide, at six-twenty-six Saturday morning.

Mason handed the judge a protractor. "The Court might like to do a little arm-chair detective work," he said. Smiling, the judge placed the protractor on the image of the candle on the picture of the murder scene.

"I'd like an explanation," Burger said.

"This candle is seventeen degrees from the perpendicular," Judge Newark said. "But the wax is evenly distributed. That's testimony that when it was burning it was straight. It shows when it was lit. Is that right, Mr. Mason?"

"Exactly. This evidence of tides is important."

Judge Newark said, "Court is ad-

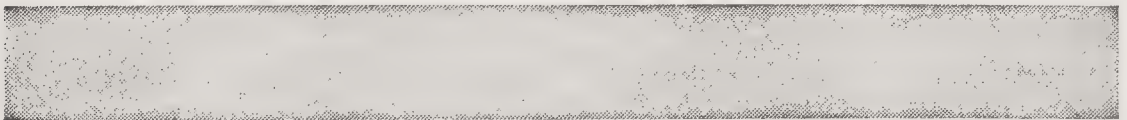
journed until tomorrow. I suggest officers check this theory. It is a vital clue..."

Back in Mason's office, Paul Drake, speaking with his characteristic drawl said, "I've got to hand it to you, Perry. You certainly do pull rabbits out of the hat. You've got the D.A. running in circles."

Mason paced the floor. He said, "Hang it Paul, I'm *almost* in the clear, but I'm afraid I can't go the rest of the way. I'm glad the judge got the point about the candle."

"But," Della Street said, "I can't understand how this candle can tie in with the bloody footprint."

"That's what bothers me," Mason said. "If Carol's story is correct she must have





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left that footprint *before* the murder was committed." He handed a photograph of the print to Drake. "What's its location?"

"Right in the middle of the tread," Drake said.

"Exactly. Now suppose that at the time she went out there the yacht was heeled way over. She'd have stepped in a pool of blood, then have started up that companionway. Ever try to climb a slanting stairway?" Mason walked over to the closet, took out a stepladder and tilted it.



"Check this theory. It is a vital clue," the Judge said.

"What would you do?"

Della Street walked over to the stepladder, raised her skirts slightly so the men could see the position of her feet clearly. "There's only one way to do it Paul," she said. "You wouldn't put your feet in the

center of the treads at all. You'd put them over in the corner, over against the edge of the ladder on the low side."

Drake whistled, "Then you don't think..."

"I know," Mason said, "that footprint must have been made when the yacht was on an even keel."

"Well, that's all right, Perry. She *says* she went out there as soon as she got the news. The footprint corroborates her story. The yacht didn't start tilting until around nine o'clock..."

"Okay," Mason interrupted, "all that checks. The only trouble is the man wasn't dead then."

"Sure he was. Reconstruct what happened. Burbank had a fight with Milfield, knocked him over so that his head hit that threshold and..."

"Or," Mason said, "hit him, knocked him over and came ashore. Someone else rowed out to the yacht, killed Milfield and left. That's what I've got to establish if I'm going to get Burbank and Carol out of this mess and it's what must have happened..."

"It would be a swell out for you—if you could prove it, Perry. But how can you



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Mason said, "Hang it, Paul, I'm almost in the clear . . ."



He handed Drake a photograph.

prove it? There would have been just two men on the yacht, Milfield and the murderer. Milfield can't talk, and the murderer won't."

Mason said, "Perhaps the murderer will talk. Perhaps he has. And the yacht will talk. All you need to do is to take into consideration the state of the tides, as any yachtsman would do, and you find the story of the prosecution and the story that has been told by the various people simply don't check."

"What does check?" Della Street asked.

"This chap, Burwell," Mason said abruptly, "he seems to be a naive lad—but he isn't as naive as he pretends . . ."

Mason said, "Do you notice how much

this chap interested in the nocturnal habits of sharks resembles Burwell?

"Let's suppose Roger Burbank hit Milfield and knocked him over. He left in a rage. Carol returns and finds the man lying with his head resting on that brass-covered threshold. She thinks her father must have killed him. Her father thinks so too. But suppose her father didn't kill him. Then we must look to the yacht itself and to the evidence of circumstances to tell us what happened and who *did* kill Milfield.

"It's simply a matter of trying to get things to check. The elements of the case are so simple that a child can grasp them, but when you put them together, they simply don't fit."



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Mason took a pad of legal foolscap from the desk, picked up a pencil and tabulated certain figures.

"Take the testimony of the witness, Cameron," he said.

He passed the schedule he had made to Drake. Della looked over his shoulder. The schedule read:

Friday night, high tide 5:41 p.m.; low tide 12:03 Saturday morning; next high tide 6:26 a.m., Saturday. Boat aground 8 p.m., Friday; started tilting 9 p.m.; had

of the body. I'll make two positions—No. 1 where the body lay when the head struck the threshold and No. 2 where the body was found.

"Now the tilting would roll the body down to position No. 2 but when the next high tide came along the body *would never roll back to position No. 1*. The yacht would just be on an even keel." He handed over the diagram.

"Well," Drake said, "there doesn't seem to be any great conflict in all of this, Perry."

"All right," Mason said, "let's start checking the testimony and the physical facts of the case with this schedule.

The autopsy surgeon says the only bleeding was from the wound on the head. There is blood near the threshold at position No. 1 and also near the head in position No. 2, leaving two distinct pools in the carpet with no connection save a few isolated drops.

"That's to be expected because the body would lie in position No. 1 until the tilting caused it to start rolling. But once it started, it would roll over and over without stopping until it fetched up against the low side."



Della walked to the ladder . . . "There's only one way."

tilted way over 10:30 p.m.; started tilting back 2 a.m.

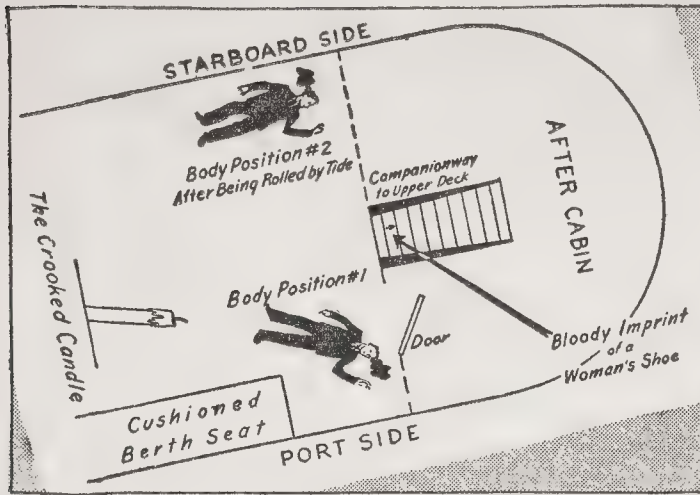
Drake said, "That seems simple enough."

"All right," Mason announced. "I'll draw a diagram of the cabin and position





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The lawyer made a diagram of the murder yacht.

Drake said, "What's wrong with that?"

Mason put the diagram on the arm of the chair so all three of them could see it.

Drake studied the diagram and said, "Well, what's wrong with all that, Perry? That's just the way a body would act. It would lie in one position until the tilt became enough to move it and then when that happened the body once in motion would roll over and over until it banged up against the low side of the cabin in the position in which it was found."

"Very good," Mason said, "but there are other factors..."

"Notice that the boat started to tilt about nine o'clock Friday night," Mason said. "The candle is tilted at seventeen degrees so it must have been lit at say nine-twenty. Remember the autopsy surgeon

says the bleeding didn't cover more than half an hour.

"Since we find blood at both positions No. 1 and No. 2, we are forced to the conclusion the murder took place somewhere around nine-fifteen Friday night after the boat had started to tilt."

Drake said, "That's corroborated by the candle."

"Exactly. Probably the candle was lit about nine-twenty and extinguished about nine-forty."

"It was dark before that," Drake said.

"Now you're getting to another puzzling feature of the case," Mason said. "Either Milfield was sitting in the cabin in the dark or there was an old stub of a candle there. When it burnt out, Milfield



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pried it loose and tossed it overboard. He thereupon lit a fresh candle . . .”

“By George,” Drake said excitedly, “that’s it, Perry. Milfield had just lit this fresh candle when the murderer came aboard.”

Mason shook his head. “Burbank and Milfield fought at six o’clock. Carol found the body in position No. 1 between seven and eight. The yacht was on an even keel, she says.”

Drake said, “The girl’s lying about the

keel when the footprint was made. How do you account for that, Mr. Detective?”

Drake scratched his head and said, “Damn it, Perry, I don’t. It just doesn’t fit into the picture.”

“Wouldn’t it be possible that this footprint could have been framed?” Della Street asked.

“Now,” Mason said, “you’re getting to the thought that’s in the back of my mind. Suppose a girl who knew something about tides, who’s smart enough to think fast in

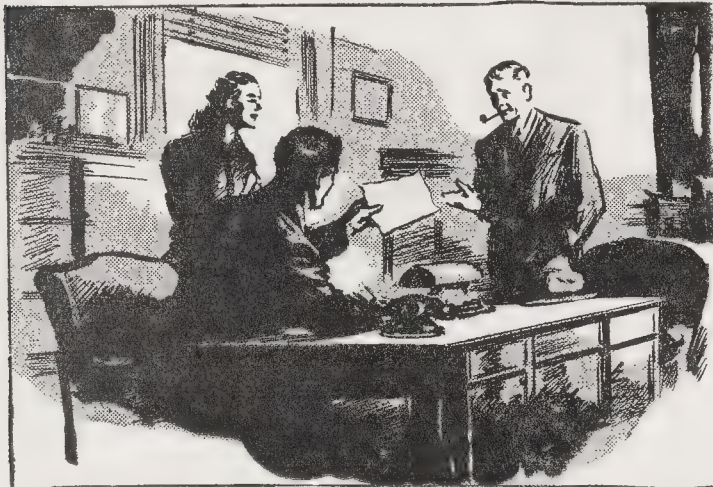
an emergency wanted it to appear the murder had taken place earlier than it had. The yacht was tilted but she realized if she left a print in the middle of the tread it would indicate it was on an even keel.”

“Then,” Drake said, “that footprint was faked. The whole thing is some sort of a frame-up. Carol is a fast-thinking little number . . .”

“Isn’t it possible the footprint was made the next morning after the boat returned to an even keel,” Della suggested.

“But would the blood remain moist that long,” Drake asked.

“I think it would,” Mason said, “par-



Mason passed the schedule . . . “The elements don’t fit.”

time.”

“That’s right,” Mason said. “Carol Burbank is lying. But there’s something which substantiates her story. It’s the footprint right in the middle of the tread. That indicates the yacht was on an even



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Mason said, "The candle is tilted at 17 degrees."



"By George," Drake said, "that's it!"

ticularly where the blood had soaked into the carpet. By examining the circumstantial evidence we have three clocks fixing the time of the murder with mathematical precision. First, there's the tides. Second is the candle. Third, there's the time during which the wound would bleed, probably not more than half an hour.

"There's only one way you can synchronize all three of those clocks so they all point to the time of the murder, and when you do that, that bloody footprint becomes absolutely out of place . . ."

Mason took a tide schedule from his pocket. He said, "Paul, tonight we're going to make an experiment. High tide is at nine-forty-two p.m., low tide at two-fifty-four a.m., tomorrow morning. The

boat should start tilting at twelve o'clock. I want to study that period."

"Where is the boat now?"

"As the representatives of the owners I've had it released from police custody. I've instructed Cameron to tow it out to exactly the spot it occupied the night of the murder. Shortly before midnight we're going down there and study the action of the tides."

Drake said, "You *would* pick the night I'm nursing a sore throat. I was going to a Turkish bath."

"You're getting the flu?" Mason asked. "Forget the yacht. There's not a darn thing you can do. I'm just going to study what happens on the boat when the tide's out."



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Della said, "I'm going with you, Chief."

"All right," Mason grinned. "Come along."

When they reached the yacht club, a low thin mist hung over the midnight waters. The silhouettes of the small yachts tied to the float seemed ghostly and unreal. A light glowed in the little cabin at the end of the pier and Cameron opened the door to greet them.

"Better come in for a few minutes and

demanded. Cameron smiled and glanced at Della, asking if it would be two or three.

"Three," Della announced.

Cameron made the drinks. Della and Mason silently toasted each other over the rims of the thick porcelain cups, then sipped the hot beverage.

"That," Mason announced, "is a life-saver."

Della asked Cameron, "Don't you get lonely?"

He puffed contentedly on his pipe. "Nope, not in a little cabin like this with everything ship-shape."

"How long will it take us to get out to the yacht?" Mason asked.

"Oh, not over ten minutes. Now, as I get it, you want to have me take you out there with my outboard motor, and leave you there. Then I'm to come back for you around two o'clock. That right?"

"That's right."

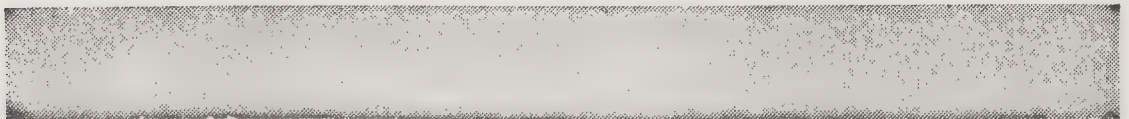
"Okay," Cameron said. "I'll be there. Just wanted to get the time straight in my mind because I hate to leave this place alone. I really ain't supposed to, but I guess a short trip like this won't hurt



Had a girl planted the footprint on the tread?

get warm," he said. "It's going to be mighty cold out there on the water. If you folks would like a hot buttered rum..."

Mason didn't even wait for him to finish. "What is holding you back?" he





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A thin mist hung over the midnight waters . . .



Cameron said, "Come in."

anything. But I'd like to time things so you'll be ready to start back soon's I get there. You found some clue?"

Mason laughed. "Not a clue. We're just looking around."

"Humph!"

"Of course we *might* find something."

"That's right. How'd I do on the witness stand today? Didn't hurt your case any did I?"

"Not a bit."

Mason, Della and Cameron took their places in the boat. The outboard motor sputtered into life and the cold night air brushed moist, chill fingers against their faces. The little boat chugged out into the channel.

After a while Della said, "Something

ahead."

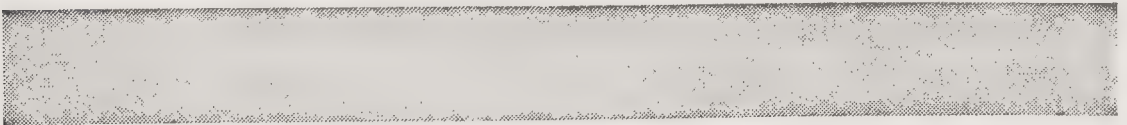
The outboard motor promptly slowed its speed. "That's the yacht," the boatman said. They came up close to the rail and Mason caught the cold, clammy support and clambered aboard. The boatman tossed him a rope, said to Della, "Now, Miss, I'll give you a hand."

They boosted Della Street up to the deck of the yacht. Cameron moved over to cling to the handrail, holding the skiff up against the yacht.

"She's aground already," Cameron said.

"That's right," Mason agreed.

"Well, watch your step when she settles. She'll go over part way, then sort of stick and then go way over with a lurch.





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Now, you want me back here at two o'clock. That right?"

"That's right," Mason said.

"Okay, I'll be here. Be careful. Don't get hurt."

Cameron seemed reluctant to shove off. He continued for several seconds to stand holding the rail, the idling outboard motor pop-pop-popping, a faint odor of burnt gasoline clinging to the water. "Well, I'll be on my way. Right around two o'clock, eh?"



Della and Mason silently toasted each other.

"That's right."

"You be all done and ready to start back by that time," Cameron reminded them as the skiff pulled out into the mist.

"Well," Mason said, taking a flashlight from his pocket, "let's go below. Watch

your step, the deck's slippery." He slid back the hatch and assisted Della down the companionway into the main cabin.

"How cozy," Della exclaimed. Mason agreed. He lit a candle and also started the little coal and wood stove in which he had asked Cameron to lay a fire. The paper and kindling crackled into cheery flame.

Mason said, "Now then, all we have to do is to wait for the tide to run out. The keel's already on the mud."

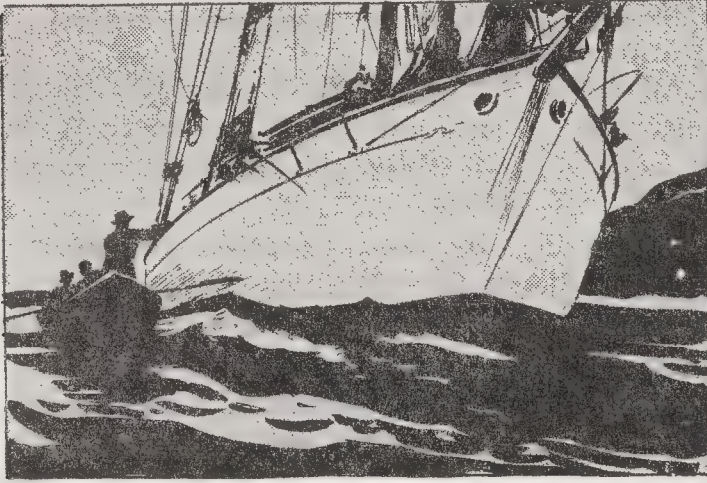
The yacht gave a slight list. "It's going to start tilting in a few minutes," Mason said. "I want to see how long before low tide a body would roll to the other side." Della Street shivered slightly. "Getting nervous?" he asked.

"A little," she admitted. "It's creepy here. Let's blow out the candle and wait by the stove light . . . I feel sort of conspicuous... Anyone could ...well, you know...through the porthole . . ." She broke off and laughed.

Mason promptly blew out the candle. "That's better," she said. He slipped an arm around her. He said, "Forget it. No one even knows we're out here." She



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They came close to the rail and Mason caught it . . .

Della Street said, "It's creepy here.

pressed herself close to his protecting shoulder. The fire crackled merrily. Silence descended upon them, a silence broken only by the tide water swirling past the grounded yacht.

The yacht swung a little more. Mason consulted the luminous dial of his wristwatch. He said, "Well, here's where I lie down and pretend I'm a dead body . . ."

Della Street glanced over in the direction of the dark red stain on the carpet and said, "I don't like to have you lie there."

"Why?"

"It seems too sinister. It might bring . . . Can't you lie in another part of the yacht just as well?"

"No," Mason said, "I'm going to conduct the experiment right here."

Mason stretched himself out on the carpeted floor of the cabin, his head within a few inches of the brass door sill of the cabin in the rear of the boat.

"Okay, Della?"

"Well, it's sort of creepy. Makes you think of ghosts."

"If Milfield's ghost could only come back and tell us exactly what happened," Mason said, "it would be a break for us."

Della came over to sit on the floor beside him. Her hand slid down Mason's arm, her fingers found his hand.

Mason patted her shoulder, said, "Remember, I'm supposed to be a corpse."

She laughed, "Don't you feel like a corpse?"

"No."



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The boat moved sluggishly, taking a little more list.

"Not enough slant as yet to roll me down to the other side," Mason observed. "When that happens, we'll take a look at the watch and notice the exact time."

Della let her fingertips stroke his forehead. "You should take things easier."

"Uh huh," Mason agreed drowsily, asked a few minutes later, "What time is it now?" She said it was near one-thirty. "Another ten minutes should tell the

much as with your head on that hard floor."

"I can't," Mason protested drowsily. "I should have my head . . . on the floor. Oh, well, perhaps this will do if I keep completely relaxed . . ."

Her fingers moved along his forehead, the fingertips caressed his eyebrows and the closed eyes, smoothed his hair. "You just lie there and relax," she said softly.

Mason raised his hand to hers, moved it to his lips, held it there for a moment, then released it. A moment later, his regular breathing showed that he was asleep. In his sleep, his hand once more groped for Della's.

Minutes passed with no change in the situation. Della Street sat motionless. The boat, now firmly aground, seemed to have ceased tilting.

Della Street herself became drowsy. The warmth of the cabin, the utter quiet which enveloped them, the relaxing

of taut nerves after a hard day in court, coupled with the lateness of the hour, made her head nod in little snatches of welcome sleep.

Abruptly, the cabin floor gave a peculiar lurch. The yacht hesitated for a mo-



He said, "Forget it. No one even knows we're here."

story."

Abruptly, Della Street shifted her position. "You don't need to be so darned uncomfortable," she said. "Here, lift up your head." She placed his head in her lap. "There, that's better. You can tell as



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Mason stretched out, his head near the threshold . . .



She said, "There, that's better."

ment, then suddenly heeled way over . . .

For the moment, Della Street, startled to wakefulness, was too frightened to say anything as the yacht heeled over. She grasped instinctively at the doorway of the cabin.

Perry Mason's limp body rolled over and over. The lawyer, wakened from a sound sleep, clawed at the carpet in a sudden, automatic reflex action.

Then Della heard a thud as Mason banged up against the starboard wall of the cabin.

A moment later, she heard his laugh from the darkness.

"Well, Della," he said, "I guess I went to sleep and that did it. The time seems to be exactly one-forty-three. According to

my mental arithmetic, that's almost exactly four hours and one minute after high tide.

"Of course, there's a slight difference in the height of the tides which we'll have to take into consideration, but it's only a few inches and . . ."

"What's that?" Della asked, startled.

Mason abruptly stopped talking.

"Listen," he cautioned.

From the outer darkness came a peculiar rhythmic thumping sound which grew momentarily louder — a sound which had a jarring undertone that seemed to strike the hull of the boat with a distinct impact.

"What is it?" Della Street whispered.

"A rowboat," Mason announced in a



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low voice.

"Coming this way?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it's the man coming back for us?—Perhaps his outboard motor went wrong and..."

"Too early," Mason said. "Keep quiet, Della. What are you doing?"

"I'm over here by the stove, getting the poker," she said. "If this should be the murderer..."

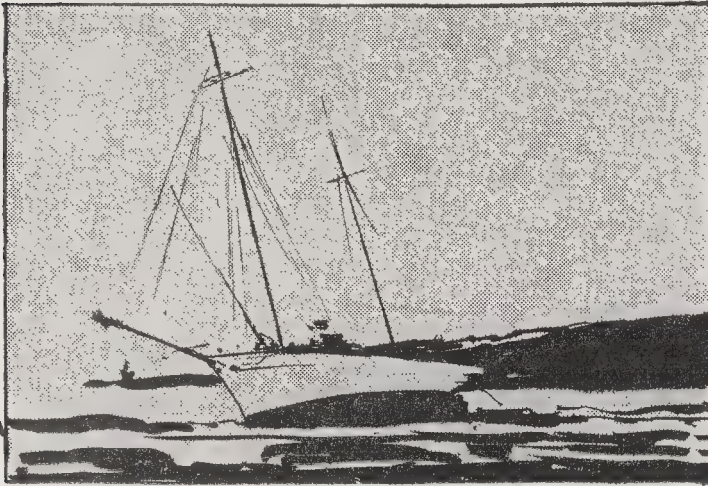
"Hush," Mason warned.

Chief, you take this poker. It's heavy and..."

Abruptly the jarring impact ran through the yacht as a rowboat thudded against the side of the yacht's hull.

Heavy feet pounded on the deck above them. The hatchway made a noise as it slid back along the metallic guides.

Mason pulled Della Street toward the doorway leading to the rear cabin. "Quick," he said in a whisper, "in the cabin!"



The yacht hesitated for a moment, then heeled over.

He groped toward her in the dim light from the stove and whispered, "Let's find that flashlight."

"I've been looking for it," she whispered. "When the boat heeled over, it must have rolled off the table. Here,

As Mason pushed Della Street into the rear cabin, a flashlight sent a brilliant circle of light down into the cabin. A leg swung over the companionway and stopped...

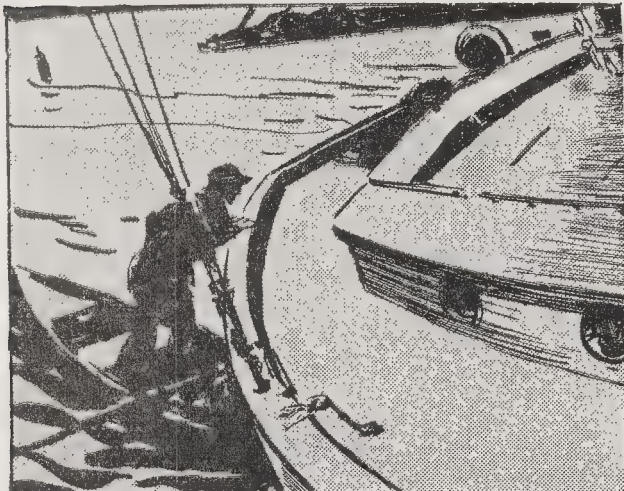
For a few seconds, the intruder on the yacht was motionless. Then the leg was withdrawn. Steps sounded across the sloping deck and thudded into the rowboat. Oars made a frantic splashing.

"Quick," Mason said, groping toward the companionway, "get that flashlight, Della. Feel along the low side of the cabin." He thrust his head and shoulders out into the chill night air.

The mist had settled into a damp fog in which panic-stricken oars splashed.



## The Case of the Crooked Candle



From the darkness came a thumping sound . . .

"Here, take this poker," Della said.

"Come back here!" Mason called. The frenzied speed of the oars was redoubled. Della thrust the flashlight into his hand and he sent a beam into the fog. It was ineffective and the sound of oars grew fainter.

"What frightened him?" Della asked.

"The stove," Mason explained. "He slid back the hatch above the companion-way and the heat came rushing up to meet him. He knew then someone was aboard."

"Gosh, Chief, I was so scared! My joints are all jelly."

Mason drew her to him. He switched off the flashlight, stood with Della pressed close, listening.

There was a faint dripping sound as fog

condensations dropped from the yacht. Otherwise, there was no sound.

"He may have quit rowing and is letting the tide take him out," Mason said, disappointment in his voice. "Lord how I wish Cameron would show up with that outboard!"

They stood straining their ears, then Della stirred uneasily, "Chief, I think I hear it."

Once more they listened. A peculiar undertone of sound grew in volume, became unmistakably the staccato of an outboard motor. Mason swung his flashlight in circles and the skiff came gliding out of the darkness. They leaped aboard. Quickly, Mason told Cameron what had happened. The outboard roared.



## The Case of the Crooked Candle

"I haven't rented any rowboats," Cameron said.

"Let's stop and listen," Mason suggested after a few minutes.

Cameron shut off the motor. The boat glided along but they could hear no other sound. Cameron said, "You can't do anything this way. He'll stop rowing when we stop."

"All right, then," Mason said. "Zigzag back and forth. He must be around here somewhere."



A flashlight sent a brilliant circle into the cabin . . .

Immediately Cameron started the motor. The craft zigzagged. Mason sat in the bow, his face straining into the darkness. He saw nothing. Cameron called, "I don't dare to do any more. I'll get lost . . . can't see landmarks."

"All right," Mason conceded. "Which way is the yacht? I want to go back again."

"I'm not exactly certain," the boatman said, "but I'll see if I can find it. What would anyone want aboard?"

Mason said, "I'm beginning to wonder. He'd hardly have been trying to remove something. Perhaps he knew we were aboard—Say, wait a minute. Perhaps we don't want to go back to that yacht . . ."

(Off to the right a quarter-mile ahead, a sheet of flame mushroomed into an exploding pattern that ripped apart the night with a concussion that all but knocked them flat in the boat . . .

At the explosion, the boatman instinctively shut off the motor. High overhead there was a whirring sound in the air — a sound which grew in intensity and was followed by a splash some hundred yards off to the left. A moment later, other splashes sounded around them.

"Falling debris," Mason said.

Cameron said, "That explosion must have been what you was thinking of when you changed your mind about going



## The Case of the Crooked Candle



Mason thrust his head out . . . "Come back here!"



The skiff glided out of the darkness.

back."

"And that's that," Mason said. "Let's go."

The outboard motor snarled into high speed. The little skiff fairly leaped ahead in the water, then swung in a wide half circle. The particles of fog moisture misted against the faces of the passengers until the fog seemed to have turned to a drizzling rain. The cold damp chill which lay along the water penetrated through their garments to the very bone.

"Won't be long," Cameron said. "Just hope I'm not lost."

There followed an interval of several minutes during which the three persons in the little boat were too chilled and uncomfortable to do any talking. Then a

sparbuoy loomed up out of the darkness almost dead ahead. Cameron swung the skiff so as to just miss the buoy. The skiff swung around in a curve and, seemingly without warning, the darkness resolved itself into mist-enshrouded outlines of moored yachts.

Cameron shut off the motor and tied the painter to a ring. "How you coming?" he asked Della Street.

"B-r-r-r!" she said and laughed.

The three of them walked down the float to Cameron's snug cabin. The welcome warmth enveloped them. Cameron poured hot water over spices, butter and sugar in three cups and added lots of rum.

Cameron was putting wood in the stove when he peered out the window.



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"Car coming," he said.

"What time is it?" Mason asked. He was told that it was two-fifteen. Della Street laughed and said, "It seems like it's been ages."

Mason took pencil and paper from his pocket. "I want to look at your tide table," he said. "I want to find out just how much difference there was between the tide tonight and what it was the night of the murder. I..."

"Coming this way," Cameron said.



Flame mushroomed into an exploding pattern.

"Look like officers."

Feet pounded along the float with a strange booming note. Two men opened the door without knocking. They eyed Cameron. "What was that explosion?" they asked.

"Burbank's yacht blew up."

"That's what we thought. You take anyone out there?" Cameron gestured toward Mason and Della Street and the officer said, "You can swear they were aboard?"

"That's right."

"How long after they left was the explosion?"

"Between five and ten minutes — not over ten."

The officer regarded Mason belligerently. "Get your things, buddy. You're going to Headquarters..."

Patiently, Mason explained to the patrolman. "There was a rowboat that came out to the yacht. I thought at the time it was someone who wanted to get something that was on the yacht, but that he became frightened when he opened the hatch and found there was a fire going in the cabin stove.

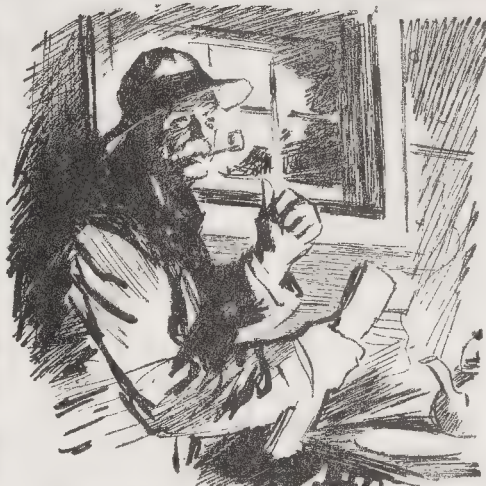
"I realize now that what he wanted was to plant a time bomb. He didn't know just how soon we were leaving the yacht, and thought that was a good chance to blow up both us and the yacht. That business of opening the hatch and starting



# The Case of the Crooked Candle



The mist resolved into outlines of yachts.



"Car coming," Cameron said . . .

down to the cabin, then turning and running from the yacht and rowing frantically away into the darkness was just part of the stall to keep us from getting suspicious as to what he had really been after. He probably planted the time bomb within a matter of seconds after getting aboard the yacht."

"What did this man look like?"

"We didn't see him."

"What sort of a boat?"

"We didn't see that."

The officer grinned—a tantalizing, superior grin. "You've got to do better than that," he said.

Mason said, "For the love of Mike! Get Headquarters on your radio. Cover the waterfront."

"And make a monkey out of myself falling for a story like that? No, Mason, you're elected." The officer turned to Cameron. "Did he come straight back or did he make some excuses to hang around near the yacht until it blew up?"

Cameron hesitated, then he blurted, "It wasn't that. We were looking around in the fog for this rowboat."

"Somewheres near the yacht?"

"About quarter of a mile."

The officer exchanged glances with his companion, then sniffed audibly and looked at the empty cups. "What you got there," he asked Cameron, "rum?"

"We did have," Cameron said dryly, making no move.

The officer jerked his head at Perry



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Mason. "Come along," he said. "You and the lady, both."

The police station light, a single bulb in the ceiling, was harsh on tired eyes. Mason, his face bearing traces of strain, tilted back in his chair with his long legs crossed. He looked at his watch. "Damn it," he said, "I can take it but you're going to get some sleep, Della."

She said, "There doesn't seem to be anything we can do."

"We'll give them five minutes more

the door.

"Now then," the officer said, "suppose you tell the Lieutenant what actually happened. You..."

"I'll do the talking, Medford," Lieutenant Tragg interrupted. He turned to Mason. "What happened?"

Mason nodded toward the officer whom Tragg had addressed as Medford. "Your skeptical friend let the murderer slip through his fingers..."

"Tell me about it," Tragg invited.

Mason told about going to the yacht, about the visit of the rowboat and the explosion. Tragg asked, "What did you find out?"

"Four hours and one minute after high tide the yacht tilted enough to roll me to the starboard side."

Tragg dismissed the officer. He said thoughtfully, "That would make the time of the murder around nine-forty." Mason pointed out

the prosecution fixed the time about six. Tragg said, "No more, it doesn't. Not after the stuff you brought out about tides and hemorrhage."

"The district attorney doesn't agree with you."



The officer told Mason, "Get your things, buddy."

and then we're going to do plenty," Mason said. "I..."

The door opened. The officer who had taken Mason into custody stood to one side while Lieutenant Tragg entered the room, then followed him in and closed



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"There doesn't seem to be anything we can do." "We'll give them five more minutes."

Tragg said, "The judge agrees with you. Burger is badly puzzled. You should have heard him grill Burwell."

"What does Burwell say?"

"That story about coming down on the Lark Friday night was the bunk. He came down on a plane Friday afternoon. Mrs. Milfield telephoned him that she'd intended to run away with him, but changed her mind after reaching the airport.

"He rushed to the airport, managed to get a canceled plane reservation, and flew down to Los Angeles to talk with her. She finally said her husband was aboard Burbank's yacht, and that she'd talk with him. She suggested that Burwell go down to the yacht club, rent a rowboat and then

pick her up down at the point.

"She told him the man at the yacht club knew her and she didn't want to be seen with Burwell. He isn't much of a hand with a boat. Mrs. Milfield rowed them out to the yacht, left him in the rowboat, went aboard, lit a candle, and stayed aboard for twenty minutes. The yacht then was pretty well heeled over. Mrs. Milfield told him things were going to be all right. He went to his hotel to wait, but at eleven o'clock the next morning Mrs. Milfield called to tell him her husband was dead and he was to swear he'd come down on the Lark."

"What does Mrs. Milfield say?" Mason asked.

"Mrs. Milfield breaks down with a



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complete admission," Tragg said. "She says Burwell is telling the truth and they went to the yacht. But she found her husband dead."

"Where?" Mason asked.

"That," Tragg said, "is the point. She says he was lying on the port side with his head near that threshold. The yacht had begun to tilt and a candle on the table had burned itself out. The wax was still soft. She lit a fresh one and stuck it in the wax. She admits she decided to do nothing

Burger will be yelling for a continuance."

Tragg puffed on his cigar. "You're a tough customer."

"I'm not naturally tough. I've learned to be tough through rubbing elbows with the police. But I'll go this far, I'll give you the key clue to the whole business."

"What's the key clue?"

"A person climbing a tilted companionway would leave a bloody footprint on the low side—not in the center . . ."

Jackson, Mason's beetle-browed assistant, was in court the next morning when Judge Newark took the bench. He explained that he was there for the defense.

Hamilton Burger arose with ponderous dignity, "The yacht was destroyed last night by a bomb," he said. "We would like a continuance."

"I have been instructed to oppose a continuance," Jackson said. Desperately, Burger

asked for a postponement until the afternoon. Again Jackson opposed the move.

"Under the circumstances," Burger said, "the prosecutor asks that the case be dismissed."

Judge Newark's face darkened. "Of



"The murderer slipped through his fingers," Mason said.

ing when she saw she would be a rich widow. But I'm telling you this for one reason—so you can tell me what's on your mind and sleep late tomorrow."

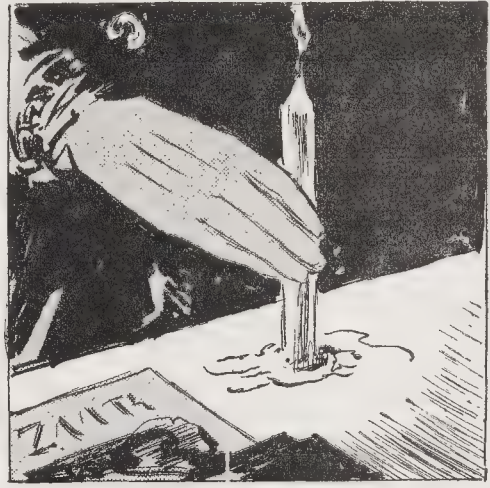
Mason laughed. "I'll sleep late anyway. I won't go near the damn court.



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Burwell had come down Friday by plane . . .



Mrs. Milfield had lit a fresh candle.

course Counsel can thwart the Court. The case is dismissed." He rose. "May I ask Counsel for both sides to appear in Chambers?"

Jackson hurried to a phone and gave the message to Mason's office. When he got back to the judge's chambers, Burger was explaining Mrs. Milfield's admission that she was aboard the yacht Friday night and found her husband dead. The judge asked, "Why didn't she report it?"

"Afraid she'd be accused of murdering him."

The judge was drawing aimless lines on a sheet of paper when the door opened and Perry Mason, buoyant and well-groomed, bowed and said, "Good morning."

Judge Newark's face showed relief. "Mr. Mason," he said, "I have become very interested in these tides."

Mason grinned. "The boat seems to rest on the ground about two hours and fifteen or twenty minutes after the high tide. It tilts more or less gradually until it reaches an angle of around seventeen degrees. Then there is a quiescent period, following which the boat goes over with a lurch."

"And the time when the boat takes that sudden lurch?"

"Last night it was about four hours after high tide."

Judge Newark's eyes sparkled with interest.

"Lots of lawyers don't like circumstan-



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tial evidence," Mason said. "I do. We know now that Mrs. Milfield was aboard the yacht at around nine-thirty in the evening. We know the yacht was tilted pretty well over then to the starboard. We know someone lit a fresh candle at about the time the yacht was tilted at an angle of seventeen degrees from the perpendicular. We know the candle was pressed into a blob of wax that had been left from an earlier candle that had been placed in the same position."



Tragg said, "You're a tough customer, Mason."

"Then do you think Mrs. Milfield committed the crime?" the judge asked. "Remember, the blow was powerful."

"So," Mason said cheerfully, "we're faced with an apparent contradiction. The murder must have been committed

when the yacht was on an even keel—because of the footprint—yet if the body rolled down to position No. 2 it must have been within twenty minutes of the time the boat lurched way over."

"You can't reconcile those facts," Burger said.

Mason grinned, "The thing is so simple it slips right through your fingers. The man was killed and the body originally fell in position No. 2. The *murderer* rolled it back to No. 1 and after a while

the tide rolled it back again to No. 2." Burger peered at the diagram over the judge's shoulder. He said, "Well, I'll be damned . . ."

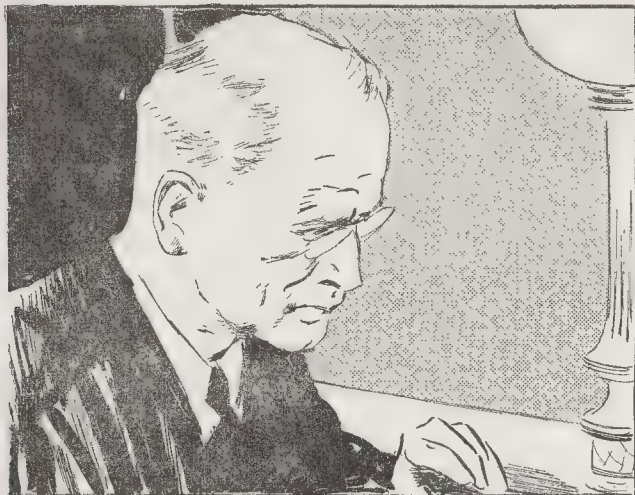
Judge Newark said, "But if the body fell into position No. 2 then the man didn't meet his death by striking his head against the threshold. What did cause death?"

"The heavy iron poker that goes with the wood stove on the yacht," Mason said.

"And the murderer overlooked one thing. Why was the body moved to position No. 1? Because the murderer wanted to implicate Burbank. Once that New Orleans case was dragged into the open, Burbank would have been convict-



# The Case of the Crooked Candle



Judge Newark's face darkened . . . "Case dismissed."



Perry Mason said, "Good morning."

ed on prejudice alone. So it was someone who knew about Burbank's past."

Mason put the diagram in his pocket. "I'd suggest the district attorney try a little third degree—fast!"

That afternoon, Mason, Della Street, Carol and Roger Burbank sat in the lawyer's office.

Drake burst in, "You called the turn, Perry," he said. "They've got the whole picture of Milfield's murder now."

"Did they get a confession?"

"Not from the main guy. He's sitting tight as a drum. Mrs. Milfield was the one who caved in."

"What did she say?"

"Enough to give Burger a case. Tell me. Perry, how you knew who com-

mitted the murder."

Mason said, "The pay-off was the fact that the body was moved from position number two to position number one. That indicates that the person who moved it must have known about the skeleton in Roger Burbank's closet, and realized that if he could make it seem the crime had been committed by Burbank, and a clumsy attempt had been made to cover up, Burbank wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance.

"There were three outsiders who knew about the secret of Burbank's past. First there was only Mrs. Milfield, then she told her husband and Van Nuys.

"Van Nuys' entire profits in the oil deal were predicated upon Milfield's ability to



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collect from Burbank. If Burbank could prove fraud, they wouldn't get a nickel.

"As I see the picture, because of the fact that an attempt was made to capitalize upon Burbank's past, the murderer had to be either Mrs. Milfield or Van Nuys.

"I'm inclined to think Van Nuys is the party because it must have been the murderer who planted that bomb, and when he planted it, he did quite a bit of splashing around with the oars. Not as amateurish as Burwell would have been, but

felt that Mrs. Milfield would probably be the weak link in the chain."

"Well, you're right, Perry," Drake said. "When Burbank realized Milfield had been knocking down on him, he ordered Milfield to meet him for a conference aboard the boat. Milfield, in a panic, got in touch with Van Nuys. Milfield was going to try and stall it along some way if possible. But just in case he couldn't, he told Van Nuys Burbank would have to be eliminated before he could do any talking.

"Between them they worked out a nice little murder scheme. Milfield was to rent a boat from Cameron, row out to the yacht, talk with Burbank, try and persuade him it was all a lie and find out just what he knew. Shortly before he went to keep his appointment, Milfield had got Palermo on the telephone. That must have been just after Burbank left

Palermo's cabin. Milfield recognized the description of the "competitive" speculator who had made the five thousand dollar offer. In desperation he offered Palermo a large sum of money to go out to Burbank's yacht and tell him he'd made



The official bent over the lawyer's diagram . . .

certainly not as expert as Mrs. Milfield.

"However, it's obvious that Mrs. Milfield must have known about her husband's murder shortly after it occurred and must have cooperated with the murderer to build up an alibi. Therefore, I



## The Case of the Crooked Candle



They sat in Mason's office . . .



Van Nuys had been arrested.

up the story of the knockdown out of whole cloth, having recognized Burbank, and hoping thereby to get a bigger slice of money for himself.

"Van Nuys was to get a folding boat—an idea they'd picked up from seeing Palermo's boat, carry it down to the estuary, launch it at a point where he wouldn't be seen, and then hang around at a safe distance but within sight of the yacht.

"When Milfield left the yacht he was to signal Van Nuys. If he had managed to pacify Burbank, then nothing was to be done. But if he hadn't been able to save the situation with a lot of convincing lies, backed up by Palermo's repudiation of his earlier statement, then Van Nuys was to slip quietly down the estuary,

drifting along with the outgoing tide, place a bomb on the deck of the yacht, drift down the channel for a hundred yards or so, then swing around and row back to where he had left his car, collapse his boat and drive back.

"Van Nuys would need an alibi for the time of the explosion.

"So Van Nuys, with whom Mrs. Milfield was really infatuated, worked out this alibi scheme. Mrs. Milfield was to go to the airport at just about the time the explosion was to take place. She was to telephone Burwell in San Francisco, saying she'd decided to join him, but that circumstances beyond her control had changed her mind. Burwell was an infatuated, inexperienced chap who had



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fallen head over heels in love with Mrs. Milfield. She'd given him a tumble just as a casual flirtation. He had written a lot of impassioned letters asking her to run away with him.

"So Mrs. Milfield worked out this fake note which she was to pretend to leave for her husband, gave Van Nuys the note and the letters Burwell had written her. Van Nuys, under pressure, was to tell very reluctantly about how Mrs. Milfield, the emotional gypsy, had been out at the airport and how he had joined her. He was to substantiate his story by dramatically producing the very note she was supposed to have left for her husband together with the packet of Burwell's letters.

"But Burbank lost his temper, knocked Milfield over and decided to have him arrested. He untied Milfield's skiff and cast it adrift, then got into his own dinghy and vanished in the direction of the yacht club.

"Naturally, Van Nuys was quite disturbed. He promptly rowed out to the yacht and found Milfield somewhat groggy from a punch on the jaw. And Van Nuys was so completely, utterly angry with Milfield that he lost his own temper, and Milfield in turn lost his, accused Van Nuys of intimacy with his



Mason said, "I guess that does it."

wife, and struck him. Van Nuys was no match for Milfield with his fists. He was knocked over by the first blow but saw the heavy iron poker lying near where he fell. He picked it up and cracked Milfield over the head. The body fell in what you've referred to as position number two.

"When Van Nuys saw that Milfield was dead, he was in a sudden panic. Then it occurred to him that since Burbank had had a fight with Milfield, he could make it appear that Milfield had died as a result of a blow Burbank had struck, and incidentally make it appear that Burbank was trying to use the same excuse he used before when he had killed a man in New Orleans.



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"So Van Nuys rolled the body over to a position directly in front of the brass-covered threshold which led to the inner cabin, opened the door to the inner cabin, and arranged everything so that the crime was framed on Burbank, then he got in his boat and rowed back—but he had to tell Mrs. Milfield.

"Van Nuys told Mrs. Milfield the whole business. He told her if she'd keep quiet he felt certain he could patch up some sort of settlement on Milfield's oil rights with Burbank and that she would be a rich widow. Mrs. Milfield had gone to the airport and put through a call to Burwell so that police could trace the long distance call. So the alibi they had fixed up to cover Van Nuys in the murder of Burbank came in very handy to cover Van Nuys in the murder of Milfield."

Mason said, "I had an idea that alibi might have been cooked up for something else—and I suppose when Mrs. Milfield found out what had happened she pointed out that Van Nuys had overlooked something."

"That's right," Drake said.

"What was it?"

"A little vest-pocket account book that Milfield kept in code. That Palermo deal wasn't the only one. Milfield had been

knocking down in a systematic way, and for his own information he was keeping a little account book which listed his transactions."

"And they decided, I take it, they had to get his book in order to make their claims good against Burbank?"

"That was about the size of it. They knew the police would start trying to pin the murder on Burbank, and felt that once this book was discovered, it wouldn't take the police long to decipher the code, and have a complete record of Milfield's chicanery. This didn't suit Van Nuys or Mrs. Milfield because then Burbank would be able to set aside all of Milfield's contracts on the ground of fraud."

"So Mrs. Milfield volunteered to go and get it, is that right?"

"Right. Burwell had shown up by then, so it was decided Daphne could use her infatuated boy friend to get her out to the yacht. She was confident she could twist him around her finger. No one at the yacht club would know him, and he could rent a boat and row down to the little rickety pier and pick her up. She'd take the boat out to the yacht. Mrs. Milfield felt she was absolutely safe because she could *prove* she'd been at the airport when the crime was being committed.



## The Case of the Crooked Candle

Well, those are the high lights of the situation. You can see that . . .”

The phone rang.

Mason nodded to Della. She picked up the receiver, listened a moment, then placed her hand over the mouthpiece.

“Chief, there’s a blonde woman out there with a black eye who says she has to see you at once. Gertie says she’s terribly upset and she’s afraid she’ll have hysterics if . . .”

“Show her into the law library,” Mason said. “I’ll talk with her there. While I’m doing that, you can get a check from Mr. Burbank payable to Adelaide Kingman for one hundred thousand bucks. You’ll excuse me, I know. An hysterical blonde with a black eye would seem to be an emergency case, at least an interesting one—The Case of the Black Eyed Blonde.”

The End.



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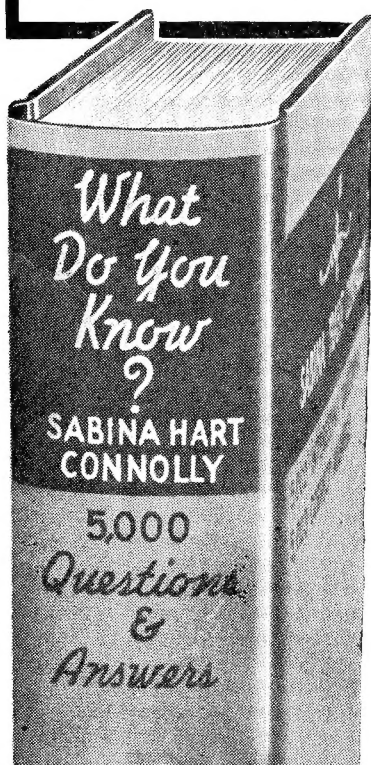
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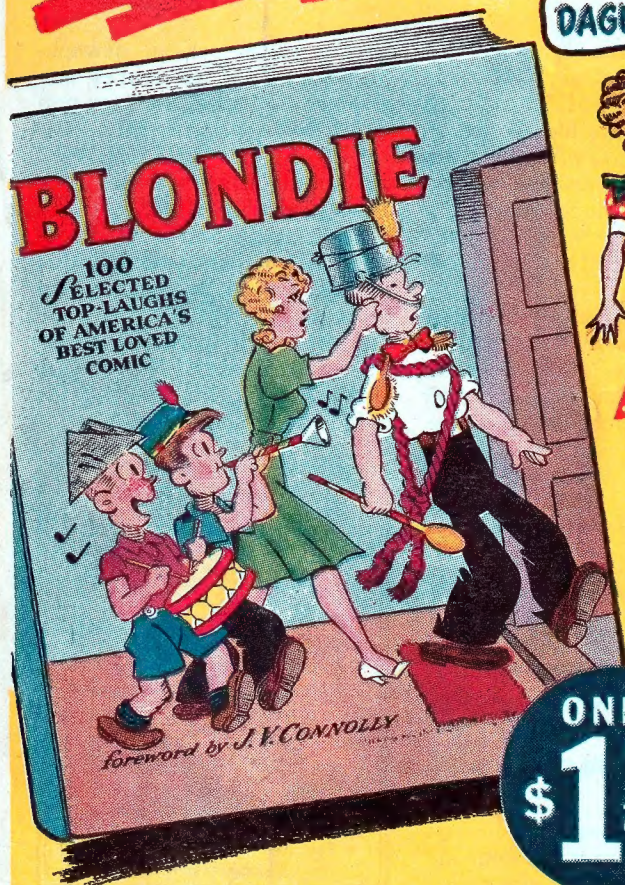
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